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A PILGRIMAGE TO NEJD.

PORTRAIT OF LADY ANNE BLUNT IN ARAB COSTUME (BY MOLONY).

[*Frontispiece.*

A PILGRIMAGE TO NEJD,

THE CRADLE OF THE ARAB RACE.

A VISIT TO THE COURT OF THE ARAB EMIR, AND "OUR PERSIAN CAMPAIGN."

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cc c

By LADY ANNE BLUNT.
AUTHOR OF "THE BEDOUIN TRIBES OF THE EUPHRATES."

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

WITH MAP, PORTRAITS, AND ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE AUTHOR'S DRAWINGS.

LONDON:
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET,
1881.

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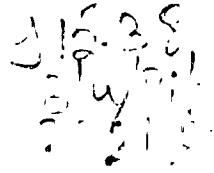
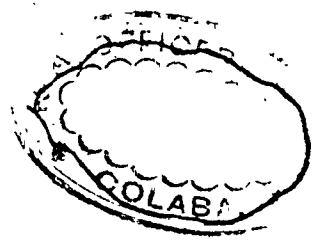




These Volumes are Dedicated

TO

SIR HENRY CRESWICKE RAWLINSON

K.C.B., F.R.S.

BY

THE AUTHORESS.

PREFACE BY THE EDITOR.

READERS of our last year's adventures on the Euphrates will hardly need it to be explained to them why the present journey was undertaken, nor why it stands described upon our title page as a "Pilgrimage." The journey to Nejd forms the natural complement of the journey through Mesopotamia and the Syrian Desert; while Nejd itself, with the romantic interest attached to its name, seems no unworthy object of a religious feeling, such as might prompt the visit to a shrine. Nejd, in the imagination of the Bedouins of the North, is a region of romance, the cradle of their race, and of those ideas of chivalry by which they still live There Antar performed his labours of Hercules, and Hatim Taï the more historical hero entertained his guests. To the Anazeh and Shammar, especially, whose northward migrations date only from a few generations back, the tradition of their birthplace is still almost a recollection; and even to

the Arabs of the earlier invasions, the townsmen of such places as Bozra, Palmyra, and Deyr, and to the Taï Bedouins, once lords of Jebel Shammar, it appeals with a fascination more than equal to that of the Hejaz itself. Nejd is to all of them what Palestine is to the Jews, England to the American and Australian colonists; but with this difference, that they are cut off from the object of their filial reverence more absolutely in practice than these by an intervening gulf of desert less hospitable than any sea. It is rare to meet anywhere in the North an Arab who has crossed the Great Nefûd.

To us too, imbued as we were with the fancies of the Desert, Nejd had long assumed the romantic colouring of a holy land; and when it was decided that we were to visit Jebel Shammar, the metropolis of Bedouin life, our expedition presented itself as an almost pious undertaking; so that it is hardly an exaggeration, even now that it is over, and we are once more in Europe, to speak of it as a pilgrimage. Our pilgrimage then it is, though the religion in whose name we travelled was only one of romance.

Its circumstances, in spite of certain disappointments which the narrative will reveal, were little less romantic than the idea. Readers who followed our former travels to their close, may remember a

certain Mohammed Abdallah, son of the Sheykh of Palmyra, a young man who, after travelling with us by order of the Pasha from Deyr to his native town, had at some risk of official displeasure assisted us in evading the Turkish authorities, and accomplishing our visit to the Ánazeh. It may further be remembered that, in requital of this service and because we had conceived an affection for him (for he appeared a really high-minded young fellow), Mohammed had been given his choice between a round sum of money, and the honour of becoming "the Beg's" brother, a choice which he had chivalrously decided in favour of the brotherhood. We had then promised him that, if all went well with us, we would return to Damascus the following winter, and go in his company to Nejd, where he believed he had relations, and that we would help him there to a wife from among his own people.

The idea and the promise were in strict accordance with Bedouin notions, and greatly delighted both him and his father Abdallah, to whom they were in due course communicated. Arab custom is very little changed on the point of marriage from what it was in the days of Abraham; and it was natural that both father and son should wish for a wife for him of their own blood, and that

he should be ready to go far to fetch one. Moreover, the sort of help we proposed giving (for he could hardly have travelled to Nejd alone) was just such as beseemed our new relationship. Assistance in the choice of a wife ranks in Bedouin eyes with the gift of a mare, or personal aid in war, both brotherly acts conferring high honour on those concerned. Mohammed too had a special reason in the circumstances of his family history to make the proposal doubly welcome. He found himself in an embarrassing position at home with regard to marriage, and was in a manner forced to look elsewhere for a wife. The history of the Ibn Arûks of Tudmur, the family to which he belonged, will explain this, and is so curious, and so typical of Arabia, that it deserves a passing notice here.

It would appear that seven or eight generations ago (probably about the date of the foundation of the Wahhabi empire) three brothers of the noble family of Arûk, Sheykhs of the Beni Khaled of south-eastern Nejd, quarrelled with their people and left the tribe. The Ibn Arûks were then a very well-known family, exercising suzerain rights over the important towns of Hasa and Katif, and having independent, even sovereign, power in their own district. This lay between the Persian Gulf and Harik, an oasis on the edge of the great southern

desert, and they retained it until they and the rest of their fellow Sheykhs in Arabia were reduced to insignificance by Mohammed Ibn Saoud, the first Wahhabi Sultan of Nejd.*

At the beginning of last century, all Arabia was independent of central authority, each tribe, and to a certain extent each town, maintaining its separate existence as a State. Religion, except in its primitive Bedouin form, had disappeared from the inland districts, and only the Hejaz and Yemen were more than nominally Mahometan. The Bedouin element was then supreme. Each town and village in Arabia was considered the property of one or other of the nomade Sheykhs in its neighbourhood, and paid him tribute in return for his protection. The Sheykh too not unfrequently possessed a house or castle within the city walls, as a summer residence, besides his tent outside. He in such cases became more than a mere suzerain, and exercised active authority over the townspeople, administering justice at the gate daily, and enrolling young men as his body-guard, even on occasion levying taxes. He then received the title of Emir or Prince. It was in no other way

* Such at least is the family tradition of the Ibn Arûks. Niebuhr writing in 1765 gives Arär as the name of the Beni Khaled Sheykhs.

perhaps that the "Shepherd Kings" of Egypt acquired their position and exercised their power; and vestiges of the old system may still be found in many parts of Arabia.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, however, Ibn Abd-el-Wahhab, the Luther of Mahometanism, preached his religious reform in Nejd, and converted Ibn Saoud, the Ánazch Sheykh of Deriyeh, to his doctrines. By Ibn Abd-el-Wahhab's help Ibn Saoud, from the mere chief of a tribe, and sovereign of one city, became Sultan of all Arabia, and reduced one after another every rival Sheykh to submission. He even ultimately destroyed the system of tribute and protection, the original basis of his power, and having raised a regular army from among the townsmen, made these quite independent of Bedouin rule. Arabia then, for the first time since Mahomet's death, became a united empire with a centralised and regular government. It must have been about the year 1760 that the three Ibn Arûks, disgusted with the new state of things in Nejd, went out to seek their fortunes elsewhere. According to the tradition, partly embodied in an old ballad which is still current in Arabia, they were mounted all three upon a single camel, and had nothing with them but their swords and their high birth to gain them credit among strangers. They

travelled northwards and at first halted in Jôf, the northernmost oasis of Central Arabia, where one of them remained. The other two, quarrelling, separated; the younger going, tradition knew not whither, while the elder held on his way still further north, and settled finally at Tudmur (Palmyra), where he married a woman of the place, and where he ultimately became Sheykh. At that time Tudmur consisted but of a few houses. His name was Ali, and from him our friend Mohammed and his father Abdallah, and his uncle Faris, the real head of the family in Tudmur, are descended.

Mohammed then had some reason, as far as his male ancestry were concerned, to boast of his birth, and look high in making a "matrimonial alliance;" but *par les femmes* he was of less distinguished blood; and, as purity of descent on both sides is considered a *sine quâ non* among the Arabs, the Ibn Arûks of Tudmur had not been recognized for several generations as *asil*, or noble. They had married where they could among the townspeople of no birth at all, or as in the case of Mohammed's father, among the Moáli, a tribe of mixed origin. The Ánazeh, in spite of the name of Arûk, would not give their daughters to them to wife. This was Mohammed's secret grief, as it had been his father's, and it was as much as

anything else to wipe out the stain in their pedigree, that the son so readily agreed to our proposal.

The plan of our journey was necessarily vague, as it included the search after two families of relations of whom nothing had been heard for nearly a hundred years. The last sign of life shewn by the Ibn Arûks of Jôf had been on the occasion of Abdallah's father's death by violence, when suddenly a member of the Jôf family had appeared at Tudmur as avenger in the blood feud. This relation had not, however, stayed longer there than duty required of him, and having slain his man had as suddenly disappeared. Of the second family nothing at all was known; and, indeed, to the Ibn Arûks as to the other inhabitants of Tudmur, Nejd itself was now little more than a name, a country known by ancient tradition to exist, but unvisited by any one then living connected with the town.

These singular circumstances were, as I have said, the key-note of our expedition, and will, I hope, lend an interest beyond that of our own personal adventures to the present volumes. To Mohammed and the Arabs with whom we travelled, as well as to most of those we met upon our journey, his family history formed a perpetual romance, and the *kasid* or ballad of Ibn Arûk came in on every occasion, seasonable and unseasonable, as a chorus to all that

happened. But for it, I doubt whether the journey could ever have been accomplished; and on more than one occasion we found ourselves borne easily on by the strength of it over difficulties which, under ordinary conditions, might have sufficed to stop us. By extreme good luck, as will be seen in the sequel, we lit upon both branches of the family we set out in search of, the one citizens of the Jôf oasis, the other Bedouins in Nejd, while the further we got the better was the Arûk name known, and relations poured in on us on all sides, eager to shew us hospitality and assistance. We were thus passed on from kinsman to kinsman, and were everywhere received as friends; nor is it too much to say that while in Arabia we enjoyed the singular advantage of being accepted as members of an Arabian family. This gave us an unique occasion of seeing, and of understanding what we saw; and we have only ourselves to blame if we did not turn it to very important profit.

So much then for the romance. The profit of our expedition may be briefly summarised.

First as to geography. Though not the only Europeans who have visited Jebel Shammar, we are the only ones who have done so openly and at our leisure, provided with compass and barometer and free to take note of all we saw. Our predecessors,

three in number, Wallin, Guarmani, and Palgrave, travelled in disguise, and under circumstances unfavourable for geographical observation. The first, a Finnish professor, proceeded in 1848, as a Mussulman divine, from the coast of the Red Sea to Haïl and thence to the Euphrates. The account of his journey, given in the Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, is unfortunately meagre, and I understand that, though one more detailed was published in his own language, he did not live long enough to record the whole body of his information. The second, Guarmani, a Levantine of Italian origin, penetrated in disguise to Jebel Shammar, commissioned by the French Government to procure them horses from Nejd; and he communicated a lively and most interesting account of his adventures to the "Société de Géographie" in 1865. He too went as a Turkish mussulman, and, being rather an Oriental than a European, collected a mass of valuable information relating chiefly to the Desert Tribes through which he passed. It is difficult, however, to understand the route maps with which his account is illustrated, and, though he crossed the Nefûd at more than one point, he is silent as to its singular physical features. Guarmani started from Jerusalem in 1863 and visited Teyma, Kheybar, Áneyzeh, Bereydah, and Haïl, returning thence to

Syria by Jôf and the Wady Sirhán. Mr. Palgrave's journey is better known. A Jesuit missionary and an accomplished Arabic scholar, he was entrusted with a secret political mission by Napoleon III. and executed it with the permission of his superiors. He entered Nejd, disguised as a Syrian merchant, from Maan, and passing through Haïl in 1864 reached Riad, the capital of the Wahhabi kingdom, and eventually the Persian Gulf at Katif. His account of Central Arabia is by far the most complete and life-like that has been published, and in all matters of town life and manners may be depended upon as accurate. But his faculty of observation seems chiefly adapted to a study of society, and the nature he describes is human nature only. He is too little in sympathy with the desert to take accurate note of its details, and the circumstances of his journey precluded him from observing it geographically. He travelled in the heat of summer and mostly by night, and was besides in no position, owing to his assumed character and the doubtful company in which he was often compelled to travel, to examine at leisure what he saw. Mr. Palgrave's account of the physical features of the Nefûd, and of Jebel Shammar, the only one hitherto published, bears very little resemblance to the reality; and our own obser-

vations, taken quietly in the clear atmosphere of an Arabian winter, are therefore the first of the kind which have reached Europe. By taking continuous note of the variations of the barometer while we travelled, we have been able to prove that the plateau of Haïl is nearly twice the height supposed for it above the sea, while the granite range of Jebel Shammar exceeds this plateau by about 2000 feet. Again, the great pilgrim-road from the Euphrates, though well-known by report to geographers, had never before been travelled by an European, and on this, as on other parts of our route, we have corrected previous maps. The map of Northern Arabia appended to the first volume of our work may be now depended upon as within its limits substantially accurate.

In geology, though possessing a superficial knowledge only of our subject, we have, I believe, been able to correct a few mistakes, and to clear up a doubt, much argued by Professor Wetzstein, as to the rock formation of Jebel Aja; while a short memoir I have appended, on the physical conformation of the great sand desert, will contain original—possibly valuable—matter. The sketches, above all, which illustrate these volumes, may be relied on as conscientious representations of the chief physical features of Central Arabia.

Botanists and zoologists will be disappointed in the meagre accounts of plants and animals I am able to give. But the existence now proved of the white antelope (*Oryx Beatrix*) in Nejd is, I believe, a fact new to science, as may be that of the *Webber*, a small climbing quadruped allied to the marmots.

A more important contribution to knowledge will, I hope, be recognised in a description of the political system to which I have just alluded under the name of Shepherd rule, and which is now once more found in Central Arabia. I do not know that it has ever previously been noticed by writers on Arabia. Neither Niebuhr nor Burckhardt seem to have come across it in its pure form, and Mr. Palgrave misunderstood it altogether in his contempt of Bedouin as contrasted with town life. Yet it is probably the oldest form of government existing in Arabia, and the one best suited for the country's needs. In connection with this matter too, the recent history of Nejd, with an account of the downfall of the Ibn Saouds, for which I am mainly indebted to Colonel Ross, British Resident at Bushire, and the decay of Wahhabism in Arabia, will prove of interest, as may in a lesser degree the imperfect picture given in the second volume of the extreme results produced in Persia by despotic rule, and the iniquitous annexa-

tion of Hasa by the Turks. The value, however, of these "discoveries" I leave to our readers to determine, premising only that they are here pointed out less on account of their own importance, than as an excuse in matter for the manner of the narrative.

With regard to the sequel of our Arabian journey, the further journey from Bagdad to Bushire, I should not intrude it on the notice of the public, but that it serves as an additional proof, if such be wanting, of the folly of those schemes which, under the name of "Euphrates Valley" and "Indo-Mediterranean" railway companies, have from time to time been dangled before the eyes of speculators. A country more absolutely unsuited for railway enterprise than that between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, has probably never been selected for such operations; and, if the recital of our passage through the uninhabited tracts, which form nine tenths of the whole region, shall deter my countrymen from embarking their capital in an enterprise financially absurd, I feel that its publication will not have been in vain.

One word before I end my Preface. It was objected to me at the Royal Geographical Society's meeting, where I read a paper on this "Visit to Nejd," that though we had crossed the Great Sand

Desert, and visited Jebel Shammar, we had after all not been to Nejd. Nejd, I was told on the "best authority," was a term applicable only to that district of Central Arabia which is bounded by the Jebel Toweykh and the lesser Nefûds, neither Jebel Shammar nor Kasim being included in it. Strange as this statement sounded to ears fresh from the country itself, I was unable at the time to fortify my refusal to believe by any more special argument than that the inhabitants of the districts in question had always called them so,—an argument "quod semper et ab omnibus" which to some seemed insufficient. I have therefore taken pains to examine the grounds of the objection raised, and to give a reason for the belief which is still strong within me that Haïl is not only an integral part of Nejd, but Nejd *par excellence.*

First then, to repeat the argument "quod ab omnibus," I state emphatically that according to the Arabs themselves of every tribe and town I have visited, Nejd is held to include the lands which lie within the Nefûds. It is a geographical expression including three principal sub-districts, Jebel Shammar and Kasim in the North, and Aared in the South. The only doubt I have ever heard expressed was as to the Nefûds themselves, whether they were included or not in the term. The

Bedouins certainly so consider them, for they are the only part of Nejd which they habitually inhabit, the stony plateaux of the centre being unfit for pastoral life. Jôf is considered outside the limit northwards, as are Kheybar and Teyma to the north-west, while Jobba and Harik are doubtful, being towns of the Nefûd.

Secondly, I plead written authority:—1. Abulfeda and Edrisi, quoted by Colonel Ross in his memorandum, include in the term Nejd all those lands lying between Yemen, Hejaz, and Irak. 2. Yakut, an Arabian geographer of the thirteenth century, quoted by Wetzstein, expressly mentions Aja as being in Nejd. 3. Merasid confirms Yakut in his geographical lexicon. 4. Sheykh Hamid of Kasim, also quoted by Wetzstein, says, "Nejd in its widest sense is the whole of Central Arabia;—in its narrowest and according to modern usage, only the Shammar Mountains and the Land of Kasim, with the Great Desert bordering it to the South." 5. Niebuhr, the oldest and most respectable of European writers, enumerating the towns of Nejd, says, "Le mont Schamer n'est qu'à dix journées de Bagdad; il comprend Haïl, Monkek, Kafar, et Bokà. L'on place *aussi* dans le Nejdsjed une contrée montagneuse nommée Djof-al-Sirhan entre le mont Schâmer et Shâm (la Syrie)," &c.; thus

showing that all, and more than all I claim, were in Niebuhr's day accounted Nejd. 6. Chesney, in his map of Arabia, published in 1838, includes Kasim and Jebel Shammar within the boundary of Nejd, and gives a second boundary besides, still further north, including districts "sometimes counted to Nejd." 7. Wallin defines Nejd as the whole district where the *ghada* grows, a definition taken doubtless from the Bedouins with whom he travelled, and which would include not only Jebel Shammar, but the Nefûds and even the Southern half of the Wady Sirhán. 8. In Kazimirski's dictionary, 1860, I find, "*Ahlu'lghada*, surnom donné aux habitants de la frontière de Nejd où la plante *ghada* croit en abondance." Finally, Guarmani gives the following as the result of his inquiries in the country itself: "Le Gebel est la province la plus septentrionale du Neged. C'est, comme disent les Arabes, un des sept Negged;" and on the authority of Zamil, Sheykh of Aneyzeh, explains these seven to be Aared, Hasa, and Harik, in the south, Woshem in the centre, and Jebel Shammar, Kasim, and Sudeyr, in the north.

Opposed to this mass of testimony, we find among travellers a single competent authority, Mr. Palgrave; and even his opinion is much qualified. After explaining that the name Nejed signifies

"highland," in contradistinction to the coast and the outlying provinces of lesser elevation, he sums up his opinion thus: "The denomination 'Nejed' is commonly enough applied to the whole space included between Djebel Shomer on the north, and the great desert to the south, from the extreme range of Jebel Toweyk on the east to the neighbourhood of the Turkish pilgrim-road or Derb-el-Hajj on the west. However, this central district, forming a huge parallelogram, placed almost diagonally across the midmost of Arabia from north-east-by-east to south-west-by-west, as a glance at the map may show, is again subdivided by the natives of the country into the Nejed-el-aala or Upper Nejed, and the Nejed-el-owta or Lower Nejed, a distinction of which more hereafter, while Djebel Shomer is generally considered as a sort of appendage to Nejed, rather than as belonging to that district itself. But the Djowf is always excluded by the Arabs from the catalogue of upland provinces, though strangers sometimes admit it also to the title of Nejed, by an error on their part, since it is a solitary oasis, and a door to highland or inner Arabia, not in any strict sense a portion of it."

The exact truth of the matter I take, then, to be this. Nejd, in its original and popular sense of

"Highlands," was a term of physical geography, and necessarily embraced Jebel Shammar, the most elevated district of all, as well as Kasim, which lay between it and Aared; and so it was doubtless considered in Niebuhr's time, and is still considered by the Bedouins of the North, whose recollections date from an age previous to Niebuhr's. With the foundation, however, of the Wahhabi Empire of Nejd, the term from a geographical became a political one, and has since followed the fluctuating fortunes of the Wahhabi State. In this way it once embraced not only the upland plateaux, but Jôf and Hasa; the latter, though a low-lying district on the coast, retaining in Turkish official nomenclature its political name of Nejd to the present day. At the time of Mr. Palgrave's visit, the Wahhabis, from whom doubtless his information was acquired, considered Jebel Shammar no longer an integral part of their State, but, as he expresses it, an appendage. It was already politically independent, and had ceased in their eyes to be Nejd. But since his day the Nejd State has seen a still further disruption. Kasim has regained its independence, and Hasa has been annexed to the Turkish Empire. Nejd has therefore become once more what it was before the Empire of Nejd arose, a term of physical geography only, and one

pretty nearly co-extensive with our term Central Arabia.

I hold, then, to the correctness of our title, though in this matter, as in the rest, craving indulgence of the learned.

WILFRID SCAWEN BLUNT.

CRABBET PARK,
August 1, 1880.

PILGRIM BANNER.

CONTENTS TO VOL. I.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

The charm of Asia—A return to old friends—Desert News—The Palmyrene colony at Damascus—New horses and camels—Mrs. Digby and her husband Mijuel the Mizrab—A blood feud—Abd el-Kader's life—Midhat Pasha discourses on canals and tramways—He raises a loan 1

CHAPTER II.

Brotherly offices—We prepare for a campaign—Mohammed Dukhi comes to court—A night robber—We start for Nejd—Tale of a penitent—The duty of revenge—We are entertained by poor relations—The fair at Mezarib 21

CHAPTER III.

Beating about—Bozra—We leave the Turkish dominions—Mohammed vows to kill a sheep—The citadel of Salkhad and the independent Druses—We are received by a Druse chieftain—Historical notice of the Hauran 46

CHAPTER IV.

We start in earnest—The Harra—A theory of Mirage—Camp of the Beni Sokkhr—Wady er Rajel—A Christmas Dinner in the Desert—Sand-storm—We reach Kâf 64

CHAPTER V.

PAGE

Kâf and Itheri—More relations—The Wady Sirhan—Locust hunting—Hanna sits down to die—Tales of robbery and violence—We are surprised by a ghazu and made prisoners—Sherarat statistics—Jôf 84

CHAPTER VI.

The Jôf oasis—We are entertained by Ibn Rashid's lieutenant—A haunch of wild cow—Dancing in the castle—Prayers—We go on to Meskakeh 113

CHAPTER VII.

The Ibn Aruks of Jôf—Mohammed contracts a matrimonial alliance—Leah and Rachel—We cheapen the bride's dower—A negro governor and his suite—A thunder-storm 129

CHAPTER VIII.

Mohammed in love—We enter the red sand desert—Geology of the Nefûd—Radi—The great well of Shakik—Old acquaintance—Tales of the Nefûd—The soldiers who perished of thirst—The lovers—We nearly remain in the sand—Land at last . . 150

CHAPTER IX.

Jobba—an unpleasant dream—We hear strange tales of Ibn Rashid—Romping in the Nefûd—A last night there—The Zodiacal light—We enter Nejd—The granite range of Jebel Shammar . 187

CHAPTER X.

PAGE

Haïl—The Emir Mohammed Ibn Rashid—His menagerie—His horses—His courtiers—His wives—Amusements of the ladies of Haïl—Their domestic life—an evening at the castle—The telephone 213

CHAPTER XI.

Political and historical—Shepherd rule in Arabia—An hereditary policy—The army—The Law—Taxation—The finances of Jebel Shammar—Ibn Rashid's ambition 257

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS TO VOL. I.

PORTRAIT OF LADY ANNE BLUNT IN HER ARAB COSTUME (BY MOLONY) . . . . . *Frontispiece*

PAGE

PILGRIM BANNER xxvi

SALKHAD 45

RUN TO EARTH 63

SAND-STORM IN THE WADY ER-RAJEL . . . . . *to face* 80

KÂF 83

GHAZÚ IN THE WADY SIRHÁN . . . . . *to face* 104

CASTLE OF JÔF 112

THE OASIS OF JÔF . . . . . *to face* 120

A NEJD SHEEP 149

THE NEFÛD OR GREAT RED SAND DESERT OF ARABIA . *to face* 160

A DELÚL RIDER 186

RECEPTION AT HAÏL 212

THE GREAT KAHWAH . . . . . *to face* 214

IBN RASHID'S STABLES AT HAÏL . . . . . *to face* 250

EVENING WITH THE EMIR 256

OUR HOUSE AT HAÏL 273

MAP OF NEJD . . . . . *At the End.*

A

PILGRIMAGE TO NEJD.

CHAPTER I.

"You have been a great traveller, Mercury?"
"I have seen the world."
"Ah, a wondrous spectacle. I long to travel."
"The same thing over again. Little novelty and much change. I am wearied with exertion, and if I could get a pension would retire."
"And yet travel brings wisdom."
"It cures us of care. Seeing much we feel little, and learn how very petty are all those great affairs which cost us such anxiety."
IXION IN HEAVEN.

The charm of Asia—A return to old friends—Desert news—The Palmyrene colony at Damascus—New horses and camels—Mrs. Digby and her husband Mijuel the Mizrab—A blood feud—Abd el-Kader's life—Midhat Pasha discourses on canals and tramways—He fails to raise a loan.

DAMASCUS, *Dec.* 6, 1878.—It is strange how gloomy thoughts vanish as one sets foot in Asia. Only yesterday we were still tossing on the sea of European thought, with its political anxieties, its social miseries and its restless aspirations, the heritage of the unquiet race of Japhet—and now we seem to have ridden into still water, where we can rest and forget and be thankful. The charm of the East is the absence of intellectual life there, the freedom one's mind gets from anxiety in looking forward or pain in looking back. Nobody here thinks of the past or the future, only of the

present; and till the day of one's death comes, I suppose the present will always be endurable. Then it has done us good to meet old friends, friends all demonstratively pleased to see us. At the coach office when we got down, we found a little band of dependants waiting our arrival—first of all Mohammed ibn Arûk, the companion of our last year's adventures, who has come from Palmyra to meet and travel with us again, and who has been waiting here for us, it would seem, a month. Then Hanna, the most courageous of cowards and of cooks, with his ever ready tears in his eyes and his double row of excellent white teeth, agrin with welcome. Each of them has brought with him a friend, a relation he insists on calling him, who is to share the advantage of being in our service, and to stand by his patron in case of need, for servants like to travel here in pairs. Mohammed's *cousin* is a quiet, respectable looking man of about five and thirty, rather thick set and very broad shouldered. He is to act as head camel man, and he looks just the man for the place. Hanna's *brother* bears no likeness at all to Hanna. He is a young giant, with a rather feckless face, and great splay hands which seem to embarrass him terribly. He is dressed picturesquely in a tunic shaped like the ecclesiastical vestment called the "dalmatic," and very probably its origin, with a coloured turban on his head. He too may be useful, but he is a Christian, and we rather doubt the prudence of taking Christian servants to Nejd. Only

Ferhan, our Agheyl camel-driver, is missing, and this is a great disappointment, for he was the best tempered and the most trustworthy of all our followers last year. I fancy we may search Damascus with a candle before we find his like again.

The evening we spent in giving and receiving news. Mohammed in his quality of Wilfrid's "brother," was invited to dine with us, and a very pleasant hour or two we had, hearing all that has happened in the desert during the summer. First of all, the sensation that has been caused there by our purchase of Beteyen's mare, which after all we have secured, and the heart-burnings and jealousies raised thereby. Then there have been high doings among our friends in the Hamád. Faris and Jedaan have (wonderful to relate) made peace,* and between them have it all their own way now on the Euphrates, where the caravan road has become quite unsafe in consequence. Ferhan ibn Sfuk, it seems, marched against his brother with some Turkish troops to help him, and Faris retreated across the river; but most of the Shammar have, as we anticipated last year, come over to him. The Roala war is not yet finished. Ibn Shaalan, rejecting the proposals made him through us by Jedaan, persisted in reoccupying the Hama pastures last spring, and Jedaan attacked and routed him; so that he has retreated southwards to his own country. Mohammed Dukhi and Jedaan have parted company,

* A truce only, I fear.

the Sebaa having cleared off scores with the Roala, and being satisfied with the summer's campaign; while the Welled Ali are still a long way on the creditor side in their blood feud. Mohammed Dukhi is a long-headed old rogue, but it is difficult to see how he is to hold his own with Sotamm in spite of a new alliance with Faris el Meziad, Sheykh of the Mesenneh, who still has some hundred horsemen to help him with, and of another with Mohammed Aga of Jerúd. The Welled Ali are at the present moment encamped close to Jerúd, so we shall probably go there, as the first step on our road to Nejd.

Mohammed of course knows nothing about the roads to Nejd or Jôf, except that they are somewhere away to the south, and that he has relations there, and I doubt if anybody in Damascus can give us more information. The Welled Ali, however, would know where the Roala are, and the Roala could send us on, as they go further south than any of the Ánazeh. The difficulty, we fear, this winter will be the accident of no rain having fallen since last spring, so that the Hamád is quite burnt up and without water. If it were not for this, our best course would undoubtedly be outside the Hauran, which is always dangerous, and is said to be especially so this year. The desert has often been compared to the sea, and is like it in more ways than one, amongst others in this, that once well away from shore it is comparatively safe, while there is always a risk of accidents along the coast.

But we shall see. In the meantime we talk to Mohammed of the Jôf only, for fear of scaring him. Nejd, in the imagination of the northern Arabs, is an immense way off, and no one has ever been known to go there from Damascus. Mohammed professes unbounded devotion to Wilfrid, and he really seems to be sincere; but six hundred miles of desert as the crow flies will be a severe test of affection. We notice that Mohammed has grown in dignity and importance since we saw him last, and has adopted the style and title of Sheykh, at least for the benefit of the hotel servants; he has indeed good enough manners to pass very well for a true Bedouin.

There is a small colony of Palmyra people at Damascus, or rather in the suburb of the town called the Maïdan, and with them Mohammed has been staying. We went there with him this morning to see some camels he has been buying for us, and which are standing, or rather sitting, in his friends' yard. The colony consists of two or three families, who live together in a very poor little house. They left Tudmur about six years ago "in a huff," they say, and have been waiting on here from day to day ever since to go back. The men of the house were away from home when we called, for they make their living like most Tudmuri as carriers; but the women received us hospitably, asked us to sit down and drink coffee, excellent coffee, such as we had not tasted for long, and sent

a little girl to bring the camels out of the yard for us to look at. The child managed these camels just as well as any man could have done. Mohammed seems to have made a good selection. There are four deluls for riding, and four big baggage camels; these last have remarkably ugly heads, but they look strong enough to carry away the gates of Gaza, or anything else we choose to put upon their backs. In choosing camels, the principal points to look at are breadth of chest, depth of barrel, shortness of leg, and for condition roundness of flank. I have seen the strength of the hocks tested by a man standing on them while the camel is kneeling. If it can rise, notwithstanding the weight, there can be no doubt as to soundness. One only of the camels did not quite please us, as there was a suspicion of recent mange; but Abdallah (Mohammed's cousin) puts it "on his head" that all is right with this camel, as with the rest. They are not an expensive purchase at any rate, as they average less than £10 a piece. One cannot help pitying them, poor beasts, when one thinks of the immense journey before them, and the little probability there is that they will all live to see the end of it. Fortunately they do not know their fate any more than we know ours. How wretched we should be for them if we knew exactly in what wady or at what steep place they would lie down and be left to die; for such is the fate of camels. But if we did, we should never have the heart to set out at all.

Next in importance to the camels are the horses we are to ride. Mohammed has got his little Jilfeh mokhra of last year which is barely three years old, but he declares she is up to his weight, thirteen stone, and I suppose he knows best. Mr. S. has sent us two mares from Aleppo by Hanna, one, a Ras el Fedawi, very handsome and powerful, the other, a bay three year old Abeyeh Sherrak, without pretension to good looks, but which ought to be fast and able to carry a light weight. We rode to the Maidan, and the chestnut's good looks attracted general attention. Everybody turned round to look at her; she is perhaps too handsome for a journey.

December 7.—We have been spending the day with Mrs. Digby and her husband, Mijuel of the Mizrab, a very well bred and agreeable man, who has given us a great deal of valuable advice about our journey. They possess a charming house outside the town, surrounded by trees and gardens, and standing in its own garden with narrow streams of running water and paths with borders full of old fashioned English flowers—wall-flowers especially. There are birds and beasts too; pigeons and turtle doves flutter about among the trees, and a pelican sits by the fountain in the middle of the courtyard guarded by a fierce watch-dog. A handsome mare stands in the stable, but only one, for more are not required in town.

The main body of the house is quite simple in its

bare Arab furnishing, but a separate building in the garden is fitted up like an English drawing-room with chairs, sofas, books, and pictures. Among many interesting and beautiful sketches kept in a portfolio, I saw some really fine water-colour views of Palmyra done by Mrs. Digby many years ago when that town was less known than it is at present.

The Sheykh, as he is commonly called, though incorrectly, for his elder brother Mohammed is reigning Sheykh of the Mizrab, came in while we were talking, and our conversation then turned naturally upon desert matters, which evidently occupy most of his thoughts, and are of course to us of all-important interest at this moment. He gave us among other pieces of information an account of his own tribe, the Mizrab, to which in our published enumeration of tribes we scarcely did justice.

But before repeating some of the particulars we learned from him, I cannot forbear saying a few words about Mijuel himself, which will justify the value we attach to information received from him as from a person entitled by birth and position to speak with authority. In appearance he shews all the characteristics of good Bedouin blood. He is short and slight in stature, with exceedingly small hands and feet, a dark olive complexion, beard originally black, but now turning grey, and dark eyes and eyebrows. It is a mistake to suppose that true Arabs are ever fair or red-haired. Men may

occasionally be seen in the desert of comparatively fair complexion, but these *always* (as far as my experience goes) have features of a correspondingly foreign type, showing a mixture of race. No Bedouin of true blood was ever seen with hair or eyes not black, nor perhaps with a nose not aquiline.

Mijuel's father, a rare exception among the Anazeh, could both read and write, and gave his sons, when they were boys, a learned man to teach them their letters. But out of nine brothers, Mijuel alone took any pains to learn. The strange accident of his marriage with an English lady has withdrawn him for months at a time, but not estranged him, from the desert; and he has adopted little of the townsman in his dress, and nothing of the European. He goes, it is true, to the neighbouring mosque, and recites the Mussulman prayers daily; but with this exception, he is undistinguishable from the Ibn Shaalans and Ibn Mershids of the Hamád. It is also easy to see that his heart remains in the desert, his love for which is fully shared by the lady he has married; so that when he succeeds to the Sheykhat, as he probably will, for his brother appears to be considerably his senior, I think they will hardly care to spend much of their time at Damascus. They will, however, no doubt, be influenced by the course of tribal politics, with which I understand Mijuel is so much disgusted, that he might resign in favour of his son Afet; in that case, they might continue, as now, living partly at

Damascus, partly at Homs, partly in tents, and always a providence to their tribe, whom they supply with all the necessaries of Bedouin life, and guns, revolvers, and ammunition besides. The Mizrab, therefore, although numbering barely a hundred tents, are always well mounted and better armed than any of their fellows, and can hold their own in all the warlike adventures of the Sebaa.

According to Mijuel, the Mizrab, instead of being, as we had been told, a mere section of the Resallin, are in fact the original stock, from which not only the Resallin but the Moáhib and the Gomussa themselves have branched off. In regard to the last-mentioned tribe he related the following curious story:—

An Arab of the Mizrab married a young girl of the Suellmat tribe and soon afterwards died. In a few weeks his widow married again, taking her new husband from among her own kinsmen. Before the birth of her first child a dispute arose as to its parentage, she affirming her Mizrab husband to be the father while the Suellmat claimed the child. The matter, as all such matters are in the desert, was referred to arbitration, and the mother's assertion was put to the test by a live coal being placed upon her tongue. In spite of this ordeal she persisted in her statement, and got a judgment in her favour. Her son, however, is supposed to have been dissatisfied with the decision, for as soon as born he turned angrily on his mother, from

which circumstance he received the name of Gomussa or the "scratcher." From him the Gomussa tribe are descended. They first came into notice about seventy years ago when they attacked and plundered the Bagdad caravan which happened to be conveying a large sum of money. With these sudden riches they acquired such importance that they have since become the leading section of the tribe, and they are now undoubtedly the possessors of the best mares among the Anazeh. The Mizrab Sheykhs nevertheless still assert superiority in point of birth, and a vestige of their old claims still exists in their titular right to the tribute of Palmyra.

Mijuel's son, Afet, or Japhet, whom we met at Beteyen's camp last spring, has taken, it would appear, an active part in the late fighting. During the battle where Sotamm was defeated by the Sebaa and their allies, the head of the Ibn Jendal* family, pursued by some Welled Ali horsemen, yielded himself up a prisoner to Afet whose father-in-law he was, and who sought to give him protection by covering him with his cloak. But the Ibn Smeyr were at blood feud with the Ibn Jendals, and in such cases no asylum is sacred. One of Mohammed Dukhi's sons dragged Ibn Jendal out of his hiding-place and slew him before Afet's eyes. On that day the Sebaa took most of the mares and camels they had lost in the previous

* One of the noblest of the Roala families.

fighting, and our friend Ferhan Ibn Hedeb is now in tolerable comfort again with tents and tent furniture, and coffee-pots to his heart's content. I hope he will bear his good fortune as well as he bore the bad.

Mijuel can of course give us better advice than anybody else in Damascus, and he says that we cannot do better in the interests of our journey than go first to Jerúd and consult Mohammed Dukhi. The Welled Ali after the Roala are the tribe which knows the western side of the desert best, and we should be sure of getting correct information from them, if nothing more. The Sebaa never go anywhere near the Wady Sirhán, as they keep almost entirely to the eastern half of the Hamád; and even their ghazús hardly ever meddle with that inhospitable region. Mijuel has once been as far south as to the edge of the Nefúd, which he describes as being covered with grass in the spring. The Wady Sirhán, he believes, has wells, but no pasturage.

Another interesting visit which we paid while at Damascus was to Abd el-Kader, the hero of the French war in Algiers. This charming old man, whose character would do honour to any nation and any creed, is ending his days as he began them, in learned retirement and the exercises of his religion. The Arabs of the west, "Maghrabi" (Mogrebins), are distinguished from those of the Peninsula, and indeed from all others, by a natural taste for piety

and a religious tone of thought. Arabia proper, except in the first age of Islam and latterly during the hundred years of Wahhabi rule, has never been a religious country. Perhaps out of antagonism to Persia, its nearest neighbour, it neglects ceremonial observance, and pays little respect to saints, miracles, and the supernatural world in general. But with the Moors and the Algerian Arabs this is different. Their religion is the reason of their social life and a prime mover in their politics. It is the fashion there, even at the present day, for a rich man to spend his money on a mosque, as elsewhere he would spend it on his stud and the entertainment of guests, and nothing gives such social distinction as regular attendance at prayer. There is too, besides the lay nobility, a class of spiritual nobles held equally high in public estimation. These are the marabous or descendants of certain saints, who by virtue of their birth partake in the sanctity of their ancestors and have hereditary gifts of divination and miraculous cure. They hold indeed much the same position with the vulgar as did the sons of the prophets in the days of Saul.

Abd el-Kader was the representative of such a family, and not, as I think most people suppose, a Bedouin Sheykh. In point of fact he was a townsman and a priest, not by birth a soldier, and though trained, as nobles of either class were, to arms, it was only the accident of a religious war that made him a man of action. He gained his first

victories by his sermons, not by his sword; and, now that the fight is over, he has returned naturally to his first profession, that of saint and man of letters. As such, quite as much as for his military renown, he is revered in Damascus.

To us, however, it is the extreme simplicity of his character and the breadth of his good sense, amounting to real wisdom, which form his principal charm. "Saint" though he be "by profession," as one may say, for such he is in his own eyes as well as those of his followers, he is uninjured by his high position. It is to him an obligation. His charity is unbounded, and he extends it to all alike; to be poor or suffering is a sufficient claim on him. During the Damascus massacres he opened his doors to every fugitive; his house was crowded with Christians, and he was ready to defend his guests by force if need were. To us he was most amiable, and talked long on the subject of Arab genealogy and tradition. He gave me a book which has been lately written by one of his sons on the pedigree of the Arabian horse, and took an evident interest in our own researches in that direction. He made the pilgrimage to Mecca many years ago, travelling the whole way from Algeria by land and returning through Nejd to Meshhed Ali and Bagdad. This was before the French war.

Abd el-Kader returned our visit most politely next day, and it was strange to see this old warrior humbly mounted on his little Syrian donkey, led

by a single servant, riding into the garden where we were. He dresses like a mollah in a cloth gown, and with a white turban set far back from his forehead after the Algerian fashion. He never, I believe, wore the Bedouin kefiyeh. His face is now very pale as becomes a student, and his smile is that of an old man, but his eye is still bright and piercing like a falcon's. It is easy to see, however, that it will never flash again with anything like anger. Abd el-Kader has long possessed that highest philosophy of noble minds according to Arab doctrine, patience.

A man of a very different sort, but one whom we were also interested to see, was Midhat Pasha, just arrived at Damascus as Governor-General of Syria. He had come with a considerable flourish of trumpets, for he was supposed to represent the doctrine of administrative reform, which was at that time seriously believed in by Europeans for the Turkish Empire. Midhat was the protégé of our own Foreign Office, and great things were expected of him. For ourselves, though quite sceptical on these matters and knowing the history of Midhat's doings at Bagdad too well to have any faith in him as a serious reformer, we called to pay our respects, partly as a matter of duty, and partly it must be owned out of curiosity. It seemed impossible that a man who had devised anything so fanciful as parliamentary government for Turkey should be otherwise than strange and original. But in this we were grievously

disappointed, for a more essentially commonplace, even silly talker, or one more naïvely pleased with himself, we had never met out of Europe. It is possible that he may have adopted this tone with us as the sort of thing which would suit English people, but I don't think so. We kept our own counsel of course about our plans, mentioning only that we hoped to see Bagdad and Bussora and to go on thence to India, for such was to be ultimately our route. On the mention of these two towns he at once began a panegyric of his own administration there, of the steamers he had established on the rivers, the walls he had pulled down and tramways built. "Ah, that tramway," he exclaimed affectionately. "It was I that devised it, and it is running still. Tramways are the first steps in civilisation. I shall make a tramway round Damascus. Everybody will ride in the trucks. It will pay five per cent. You will go to Bussora. You will see my steamers there. Bussora, through me, has become an important place. Steamers and tramways are what we want for these poor countries. The rivers of Damascus are too small for steamers, or I should soon have some afloat. But I will make a tramway. If we could have steamers and tramways everywhere Turkey would become rich." "And canals," we suggested, maliciously remembering how he had flooded Bagdad with his experiments in this way. "Yes, and canals too. Canals, steamers, and tramways, are what we want." "And

railways." "Yes, railways. I hope to have a railway soon running alongside of the carriage road from Beyrout. Railways are important for the guaranteeing of order in the country. If there was a railway across the desert we should have no more trouble with the Bedouins. Ah, those poor Bedouins, how I trounced them at Bagdad. I warrant my name is not forgotten there." We assured him it was not.

He then went on to talk of the Circassians, "*ces pauvres Circassiens*," for he was speaking in French, "*il faut que je fasse quelque chose pour eux.*" I wish I could give some idea of the tone of tenderness and almost tearful pity in Midhat's voice as he pronounced this sentence; the Circassians seemed to be dearer to him than even his steamers and tramways. These unfortunate refugees are, in truth, a problem not easy of solution: they have been a terrible trouble to Turkey, and, since they were originally deported from Russia after the Crimean war, they have been passed on from province to province until they can be passed no further. They are a scourge to the inhabitants wherever they go, because they are hungry and armed, and insist on robbing to get a livelihood. To the Syrian Arabs they are especially obnoxious, because they shed blood as well as rob, which is altogether contrary to Arab ideas. The Circassians are like the foxes which sportsmen turn out in their covers. It is a public-spirited act to have done so, but they cannot

be made to live in peace with the hares and rabbits. Midhat, however, had a notable scheme for setting things to rights. He would draft all these men into the corps of zaptiehs, and then, if they did rob, it would be in the interests of Government. Some score of them were waiting in the courtyard at the time of our visit, to be experimented on; and a more evil-visaged set it would have been difficult to select.

On the whole, we went away much impressed with Midhat, though not as we had hoped. He had astonished us, but not as a wise man. To speak seriously, one such reforming pasha as this does more to ruin Turkey than twenty of the old dishonest sort. Midhat, though he fails to line his own purse, may be counted on to empty the public one at Damascus, as he did at Bagdad, where he spent a million sterling on unproductive works within a single year. As we wished him good-bye, we were amused to notice that he retained Mr. Siouffi, the manager of the Ottoman Bank, who had come with us, with him for a private conference, the upshot of which was his first public act as Governor of Syria, the raising of a loan.*

* Midhat's reign at Damascus lasted for twenty months, and is remarkable only for the intrigues in which it was spent. It began with an *action d'éclat*, the subjugation of the independent Druses of the Hauran, a prosperous and unoffending community whom Midhat with the help of the Welled Ali reduced to ruin. The rest of his time and resources were spent in an attempt to gain for himself the rank and title of khedive, a scheme which ended in

his recall. Of improvements, material or administrative, nothing at all has been heard, but it is worth recording that a series of fires during his term of office burnt down great part of the bazaars at Damascus, causing much loss of property, and that their place has been taken by a boulevard. Midhat has been now removed to Smyrna, where it is amusing to read the following account of him:—

"MIDHAT PASHA.—September 28:—'A private correspondent of the *Journal de Genève*, writing ten days ago from Smyrna, says that Midhat Pasha, being convinced that he possessed the sympathy of the inhabitants and could count on their active co-operation, conceived a short time since vast schemes of improvement and reform for the benefit of the province which he has been called upon to administer. The first works he proposed to take in hand were the drainage of the great marshes of Halka-Bournar (the Baths of Diana of the ancients), the cleansing of the sewers of Smyrna, and the removal of the filth which cumbers the streets, pollutes the air, and, as an eminent physician has told him, impairs the health of the city and threatens at no distant date to breed a pestilence. He next proposed, at the instance of a clever engineer Effendi, to repress the ravages of the river Hermus, which in winter overflows its banks and does immense damage in the plain of Menemen. Orders were given for the execution of engineering works on a great scale which, it was thought, would correct this evil and restore to agriculture a vast extent of fertile, albeit at present unproductive, land. Administrative reform was to be also seriously undertaken. The police were to be re-organized, and order and honesty enforced in the courts of justice. The scandal of gendarmes being constrained, owing to the insufficiency of their pay, to enter into an alliance, offensive and defensive, with all the thieves and cut-throats of the city—the disgrace of judges receiving bribes from rogues and other evil-doers—were to be promptly put down. It was ordered that every caïmacan, mudir, chief of police, and president of tribunal, guilty either of malfeasance or robbery, should be arrested and imprisoned. The municipalities were to cease being the mere mouthpieces of the valis, and consider solely the interests of their constituencies. The accounts of functionaries who, with nominal salaries of 800 francs a year, spend 10,000, were to be strictly investigated and their malversations severely punished; and many other measures, equally praiseworthy and desirable, were either projected or begun. But energy and good-will in a reformer—whether he be a Midhat or a Hamid—are,

unfortunately, not alone sufficient to accomplish reforms. To drain marshes, embank rivers, cleanse sewers, remove filth, pay magistrates and policemen, procure honest collectors of revenue, much money is necessary. How was it to be obtained? Not from the revenues of the port or the province; these are sent regularly, to the last centime, to Constantinople, for the needs of the Government are urgent and admit of no delay. Midhat Pasha, not knowing which way to turn, called a *medjeless* (council), but the members were able neither to suggest a solution of the difficulty nor to find any money. In this emergency it occurred to the Governor that there existed at Smyrna a branch of the Ottoman Bank, at the door of which are always stationed two superb nizams in gorgeous uniforms, who give it the appearance of a Government establishment. Why should not the bank provide the needful? The idea commended itself to the Pasha, and the manager was requested to call forthwith at the Konak on urgent public business. When he arrived there Midhat unfolded to him his plans of reform, and proved, with the eloquence of a new convert, that the public works he had in view could not fail to be an unspeakable benefit to the province and restore its waning prosperity. Never, he assured the wondering manager, could the bank have a finer opportunity of making a splendid investment than this of lending the Government a few million francs, to be strictly devoted to the purposes he had explained. The projected schemes, moreover, were to be so immediately profitable that the bank might reckon with the most implicit confidence on receiving back, in the course of a few years, both interest and principal. Unfortunately, however, all these arguments were lost on M. Heintze, the manager; and he had to explain to the Pasha that, although he, personally, would have been delighted to advance him the millions he required, his instructions allowed him no discretion. He was there to do ordinary banking business, and collect certain revenues which had been assigned to the bank by way of security; but he had been strictly enjoined to make no loans whatever, however promising and profitable they might appear. And this was the end of Midhat Pasha's great schemes of public improvement and administrative reform. In these circumstances it would be the height of injustice to accuse him of not having kept the promises which he made on entering office; for nobody, not even a Turkish Governor-General, can be expected to achieve impossibilities.'"

CHAPTER II.

"This shadowy desert, unfrequented woods,
I better brook than flourishing peopled towns."
SHAKESPEARE.

Brotherly offices—We prepare for a campaign—Mohammed Dukhi comes to court—A night robber—We start for Nejd—Tale of a penitent—The duty of revenge—We are entertained by poor relations—The fair at Mezarib.

WE spent a week at Damascus, a week not altogether of pleasure, although it was to be our last of civilised life. We had an immense number of things to buy and arrange and think over, before starting on so serious a journey as this, which we knew must be very unlike the pleasure trip of last year. We could not afford to leave anything to chance with the prospect of a three months' wandering, and a thousand miles of desert, where it was impossible to count upon fresh supplies even of the commonest necessaries of life. Jôf, the first station on our road, was four hundred miles off, and then we must cross the Nefúd, with its two hundred miles of sand, before we could get to Nejd. The return journey, too, to the Persian Gulf, would have to be made without coming to anything so European as a Turkish town. Nobody could tell us what supplies were to be had in Nejd, beyond dates and corn. Mr. Palgrave's account of Jebel

Shammar was, in fact, the only guide we had to go on, and its accuracy had been so much doubted that we felt obliged to take into consideration the possibility of finding the Nejd towns mere oases, and their cultivation only that of the date.

Mohammed, less "insouciant" than most of his countrymen are on such matters, now made himself most useful, spending many hours in the bazaars with Wilfrid, as I did with the cook and the camel-man; and being a town Arab and a trader born, he saved us an infinity of trouble and time, and no few mejidies.

They began by choosing a complete suit of Bedouin clothes for Wilfrid, not exactly as a disguise, for we did not wish, even if we could have done so, not to pass for Europeans, but in order to avoid attracting more notice than was necessary on our way. The costume consisted of a striped silk jibbeh or dressing-gown worn over a long shirt, a blue and white abba of the kind made at Karieteyn, and for the head a black kefiyeh embroidered with gold which was fastened on with the Bedouin aghal, a black lamb's-wool rope. Mohammed had brought with him a sword which had belonged to his grandfather, a fine old Persian blade curved like a sickle. He gave it to Wilfrid and received in return a handsome weapon somewhat similar but silver-mounted, which they found in the bazaar. Thus rigged out, for Mohammed too had been reclothed from head to foot (and he much required it), they used to sally

out in the town as two Bedouin gentlemen. Wilfrid by holding his peace was able to pass with the unwary as an unconcerned friend, while Mohammed did the bargaining for cloaks, kefiyehs, and other articles suitable as presents to the Sheykhs whose acquaintance we might make. Mohammed was an expert in driving a hard bargain and knew the exact fashion in vogue in each Bedouin tribe, so that although his taste did not always quite agree with ours, we let him have his way. The only mistake he made, as it turned out, was in underestimating the value of gifts necessary in Haïl. Not one of us had the least idea of the luxury existing in Nejd, and Mohammed, like most of the northern Arabs, had heard of Ibn Rashid only as a Bedouin Sheykh, and fancied that a red cloth jibbeh would be the *ne plus ultra* of magnificence for him, as indeed it would have been for an Ibn Shaalan or an Ibn Mershid. We had, however, some more serious presents than these to produce, if necessary, in the rifles and revolvers we carried with us, so that we felt there was no real danger of arriving empty-handed.

The purchases which it fell to my share to make, with the assistance of Abdallah and the cook, were entirely of a useful sort, and do not require a detailed description here. As to dress, it was unnecessary for me to make any change, save that of substituting a kefiyeh for a hat and wearing a Bedouin cloak over my ordinary travelling ulster.

Hanna and Abdallah were both of them masters in the art of haggling, and vied with each other in beating down the prices of provisions. Dates, flour, burghul (a kind of crushed wheat, which in Syria takes the place of rice), carrots, onions, coffee, and some dried fruit were to be the mainstay of our cooking, and of these we bought a supply sufficient to last us as far as Jôf. We had brought from England some beef tea, vegetable soup squares, and a small quantity of tea in case of need. We had agreed to do without bulky preserved provisions, which add greatly to the weight of baggage, and that as to meat, we would take our chance of an occasional hare or gazelle, or perhaps now and then a sheep.

All began well. Our servants seemed likely to turn out treasures, and we had no difficulty in getting a couple of Agheyls to start with us as camel drivers. We thought it prudent to keep our own counsel as to the direction we intended to take, and it was generally supposed that Bagdad was to be our first object. Only Mohammed and Hanna were informed of the real design, and them we could trust. Not but what Hanna had occasional fits of despondency about the risk he ran. He did not pretend to be a hero, he had a wife and children to whom he was sincerely attached, and he felt, not quite wrongly, that Central Arabia was hardly the place for one of his nation and creed. He came to us, indeed, one morning, to announce

his intention of returning home to Aleppo, and he required a good deal of humouring before he recovered his spirits; but I do not think that he ever seriously intended to desert us. He had come all the way from Aleppo to join us, and, besides, the companionship of the young giant he called his "brother," who was to share his tent, reassured him. Once started, we knew that he would bear patiently all that fortune might inflict.

By the 11th the necessary preparations had been made, and we were ready to start. As a preliminary, we moved into a garden outside the town with our camels and our mares, so as to be at liberty to go off any morning without attracting notice and in the direction we might choose. It was generally believed in Damascus that we intended going to Bagdad, and we had made up our minds to start in that direction, partly to avoid questions, and partly because at Jerúd, the first village on the road to Palmyra, we should find Mohammed Dukhi with the Welled Ali. He seemed the most likely person to put us on our way, and in expeditions of this sort the first few marches are generally the most difficult, if not the most dangerous. The edges of the desert are always unsafe, whereas, once clear of the shore, so to speak, there is comparatively little risk of meeting anybody, friend or foe. We thought then that we should be able to get a man from Mohammed Dukhi to take us in a straight line from Jerúd to some point in the Wady Sirhán,

keeping well outside the Hauran, a district of the worst reputation, and following perhaps a line of pools or wells which the Bedouins might know. But just as we had settled this, Mohammed Dukhi himself appeared unexpectedly at Damascus, and our plan was changed.

Mohammed Dukhi ibn Smeyr is the greatest personage in the north-western desert next to Ibn Shaalan, and as I have said before was at that time hotly engaged in a war with the Roala chief. His object in visiting Damascus was as follows: in the course of the autumn a detachment of fifteen Turkish soldiers attacked his camp without provocation and, firing into it, killed a woman and a child. This camp numbered only a few tents, the tribe being at the time scattered on account of pasturage, and the Sheykh himself was absent with most of the men. Those, however, who had remained at home managed to cut off and surround the soldiers, one of whom was killed in the fray. The Welled Ali would have killed the rest but for Mohammed Dukhi's wife, Herba,* who rushed in among the combatants, and remonstrated with her people on the folly of involving themselves in a quarrel with the Government. Her pluck saved the soldiers' lives. She took them under her protection, and the next morning sent them under escort to a place of safety.

Now Mohammed Dukhi, having the Roala war

* Daughter of Faris-el-Meziad, Sheykh of the Mesenneh.

on his hands and being obliged to shelter himself from Ibn Shaalan under the walls of Jerúd, was naturally anxious to clear up this matter of the soldier's death; and, directly he heard of Midhat's arrival at Damascus, he shrewdly determined to make his count with the new Pasha by an early call at the Serai. Ibn Shaalan was out of the way, and the first comer would doubtless be the one most readily listened to. Ibn Smeyr had besides a little intrigue on foot respecting the escort of the Damascus pilgrims, which he in part provided or hoped to provide. Abd el-Kader was his friend, and it was at the Emir's house that he alighted and that we found him. Mohammed Dukhi, noble though he is in point of blood, is not a fine specimen of a great Bedouin Sheykh. His politeness is overstrained and unnatural, reminding one rather of city than of desert manners; there are also ugly stories of his want of faith, which one finds no difficulty in believing when one sees him. He affected, however, great pleasure at seeing us again, and professed an entire devotion to our welfare and our plans. He would himself accompany us on the first stages of our road, or at least send his sons or some of his men; offers which dwindled, till at last they resulted in his merely writing some letters of recommendation for us, and giving us a large amount of good advice. As regards the latter, he informed us that a journey such as we proposed outside the Hauran would not at the present

moment be practicable. No rain had fallen during the autumn, and the Hamád was without water; indeed, except in the Wady Sirhán, where the wells were never dry, there was no watering place southwards at any distance from the hills. He advised us, therefore, to leave Damascus by the pilgrim road, which keeps inside the Hauran, and follow it till we came across the Beni Sokkhr, whom we should find encamped not far to the east of it. There was besides a capital opportunity for us of doing this in company with the *Jerdeh*, now on the point of starting for Mezárib, a station on the Haj road. The Jerdeh, he explained, for the name was new to us, are a kind of relief party sent every year from Damascus, to meet the pilgrims on their homeward route, carrying with them supplies of all the necessaries of life, provisions, and extra camels to replace those broken down. The party is escorted by Mohammed Dukhi, or rather by his men, and the idea of joining them seemed exactly suited to our purpose; though when we came to put it in practice, it turned out to be of as little value as the rest of the smooth-spoken Sheykh's offers. It was something, however, to have a plan, good or bad, and letters from so great a man as Ibn Smeyr were of value, even though addressed to the wrong people.

Accordingly, on the 12th we bade good-bye to our Damascus friends, wrote our last letters to our friends in England, and said a long farewell to

the pleasures and pains of European life. On the 13th we started.

December 13.—We have started at last, and on a Friday, the 13th of the month. I have no personal objection to any particular day of the week, or of the month. But, as a matter of fact, the only seriously unfortunate journey we ever made was begun on a Friday, and Wilfrid professes himself to be superstitious and full of dark forebodings. He, however, insisted on starting this Friday, and with some inconsistency argues that forebodings are lucky, or that at any rate the absence of them is unlucky, and that it would not be safe to begin a journey in a cheerful frame of mind.

We were roused in the middle of the night by a cry of thieves in the garden, and running out of our tent found a scuffle going on, which, when lights were brought, proved to have been caused by two men, one the keeper of the garden and the other a soldier, whom he was taking prisoner. Our servants were standing round them, and Hanna, seeing the man to be securely bound, was belabouring him with a stick, ejaculating at intervals, "O robber, O dog, O pig! O pig, O dog, O robber!" The story told us was that the gardener had found this man prowling about, and had, after a terrible engagement, succeeded in his capture. There were, however, no blood or wounds to show; and, the evidence of the prisoner's wicked designs not being

very overwhelming, Wilfrid gave orders that he should be let go as soon as it should be daylight. In the first place, any handing over of the man to justice would have delayed our start, and secondly, it was more than probable that the whole thing had been got up by the gardener with the accused person for the sake of the present the two would receive. Such little comedies are quite common in the East; and when we declined to take it seriously, the two men very good-humouredly let the matter drop.

At the first streak of dawn we struck our tents, loaded our camels, and a little after sunrise were on our mares and well away from the town in marching order for Nejd! At first we skirted the city, passing the gate where St. Paul is said to have entered, and the place where he got over the wall, and then along the suburb of Maïdan, which is the quarter occupied by Bedouins when they come to town, and where we had found the Tudmuri and our camels. Here we were to have met the Jerdeh, and we waited some time outside the Bawâbat Allah, or "Gates of God," while Mohammed went in to make inquiries, and take leave of his Tudmuri friends. It is in front of this gate that the pilgrims assemble on the day of their start for Mecca, and from it the Haj road leads away in a nearly straight line southwards. The Haj road is to be our route as far as Mezárib, and is a broad, well worn track, though of course not a road at all according to English ideas. It has, nevertheless,

a sort of romantic interest, one cannot help feeling, going as it does so far and through such desolate lands, a track so many thousand travellers have followed never to return. I suppose in its long history a grave may have been dug for every yard of its course from Damascus to Medina, for, especially on the return journey, there are constantly deaths among the pilgrims from weariness and insufficient food.

Our caravan, waiting at the gate, presented a very picturesque appearance. Each of the delúls carries a gay pair of saddle-bags in carpet-work, with long worsted tassels hanging down on each side half way to the ground; and they have ornamented *reshmehs* or headstalls to match. The camels, too, though less decorated, have a gay look; and Wilfrid on the chestnut mare ridden in a halter wants nothing but a long lance to make him a complete Bedouin. The rest of our party consists, besides Mohammed and Hanna, who have each of them a delul to ride, of Mohammed's "cousin" Abdallah, whom we call Sheykh of the camels, with his two Agheyl assistants, Awwad, a negro, and a nice-looking boy named Abd er-Rahman. These, with Mohammed, occupy one of the servants' tents, while Hanna and his "brother" Ibrahim have another, for even in the desert distinctions of religious caste will have to be preserved. It is a great advantage in travelling that the servants should be as much as possible strangers to each other, and of

different race or creed, as this prevents any combination among them for mutiny or disobedience. The Agheyls will be one clique, the Tudmuri another, and the Christians a third, so that though they may quarrel with one another, they are never likely to unite against us. Not that there is any prospect of difficulty from such a cause; but three months is a long period for a journey, and everything must be thought of beforehand.

Mohammed was not long in the Maïdan, and came back with the news that the Jerdeh has not been seen there, but might be at a khan some miles on the road called Khan Denún. It was useless to wait for them there, and so, wishing our friend, Mr. Siouffi, good-bye (for he had accompanied us thus far) we rode on. Nothing remarkable has marked our first day's journey; a gazelle crossing the track, and a rather curious squabble between a kite, a buzzard, and a raven, in which the raven got all the profit, being the only events. From the crest of a low ridge we looked back and saw our last of Damascus, with its minarets and houses imbedded in green. We shall see no more buildings, I suppose, for many a day. Mount Hermon to the left of it rose, an imposing mass, hazy in the hot sun, for, December though it is, the summer is far from over. Indeed, we have suffered from the heat today more than we did during the whole of our last journey.

At Denún no sign or knowledge of the Jerdeh, so we have decided to do without them. On a road like this we cannot want an escort. There are plenty of people passing all day long, most of them, like ourselves, going to Mezárib for the annual fair which takes place there on the occasion of the Jerdeh visit. Among them, too, are zaptiehs and even soldiers; and there are to be several villages on the way. We filled our goat-skins at Denún and camped for this our first night on some rising ground looking towards Hermon. It is a still, delightful evening, but there is no moon. The sun is setting at five o'clock.

December 14.—Still on the Haj road and through cultivated land, very rich for wheat or barley, Mohammed says, though it has a fine covering of stones. These are black and volcanic, very shiny and smooth, just as they were shot up from the Hauran when the Hauran was a volcano. The soil looks as if it ought to grow splendid grapes, and some say the bunches the spies brought to Joshua came from near here. The villages, of which we have passed through several, are black and shiny too, dreary looking places even in the sunshine, without trees or anything pleasant to look at round them. The fields at this time of year are of course bare of crops, and it is so long since there was any rain that even the weeds are gone. This is part of what is called the Leja, a district entirely of black boulders, and interesting to archæologists as being

the land of Og, king of Basan, whose cities some have supposed to exist in ruins to the present day.

In the middle of the day we passed a small ruin, about which Mohammed, who has been this road before, as his father was at one time camel-contractor for the Haj, told us a curious story. Once upon a time there were two children, left orphans at a very early age. The elder, a boy, went out into the world to seek his fortune, while the other, a girl, was brought up by a charitable family in Damascus. In course of time the brother and sister came together by accident, and, without knowing their relationship, married, for according to eastern usage the marriage had been arranged for them by others. Then, on comparing notes, they discovered the mistake which had been made; and the young man, anxious to atone for the guilt they had inadvertently incurred, consulted a wise man as to what he should do in penance. He was told to make the pilgrimage to Mecca seven times, and then to live seven years more in some desert place on the Haj road offering water to the pilgrims. This he did, and chose the place we passed for the latter part of his penance. When the seven years were over, however, he returned to Damascus, and the little house he had built and the fig-trees he had planted remain as a record of his story. Mohammed could not tell me what became of the girl, and seemed to think it did not matter.

He has been talking a great deal to us on the duties

of brotherhood, which seemed a little like a suggestion. The rich brother, it would seem, should make the poor one presents, not only of fine clothes, but of a fine mare, a fine delúl; or a score of sheep,—while the poor brother should be very careful to protect the life of his sworn ally, or, if need be, to avenge his death. Wilfrid asked him how he should set about this last, if the case occurred. "First of all," said Mohammed, "I should inquire who the shedder of blood was. I should hear, for instance, that you had been travelling in the Hauran and had been killed, but I should not know by whom. I should then leave Tudmur, and, taking a couple of camels so as to seem to be on business, should go to the place where you had died, under a feigned name, and should pretend to wish to buy corn of the nearest villagers. I should make acquaintance with the old women, who are always the greatest talkers, and should sooner or later hear all about it. Then, when I had found out the real person, I should watch carefully all his goings out and comings in, and should choose a good opportunity of taking him unawares, and run my sword through him. Then I should go back to Tudmur as fast as my delúl could carry me." Wilfrid objected that in England we thought it more honourable to give an enemy the chance of defending himself; but Mohammed would not hear of this. "It would not be right. My duty," he said, "would be to avenge your blood, not to fight with the man; and if I got the oppor-

tunity, I should come upon him asleep or unarmed. If he was some poor wretch, of no consequence, I should take one of his relations instead, if possible the head of his family. I cannot approve of your way of doing these things. Ours is the best." Mohammed might have reasoned (only Arabs never reason), that there were others besides himself concerned in the deed being secretly and certainly done. An avenger of blood carries not only his own life but the lives of his family in his hand; and if he bungles over his vengeance, and himself gets killed, he entails on them a further debt of blood. To Mohammed, however, on such a point, reasoning was unnecessary. What he had described was the custom, and that was enough.

We are now a little to the south of the village of Gunayeh where we have sent Abdallah with a delúl to buy straw. There is no camel pasture here nor anything the horses can eat. To the east we can see the blue line of the Hauran range, and to the west the Syrian hills from Hermon to Ajalon. I told Mohammed the story of the sun standing still over Gibeon and the moon over Ajalon, which he took quite as a matter of course, merely mentioning that he had never heard it before.

I forgot to say that we crossed the old Roman road several times to-day. It is in fair preservation, but the modern caravan track avoids it. Perhaps in old days wheeled carriages were common and required a stone road. Now there is no such

necessity. At Ghabaghat, a village we passed about eleven o'clock, we found a tank supplied with water from a spring, and while we were waiting there watering the camels a fox ran by pursued by two greyhounds, who soon came up with and killed him. One of the dogs, a blue or silver grey, was very handsome and we tried to buy him of his owner, a soldier, but he would not take the money. After that we had a bit of a gallop in which we were pleased with our new mares. But we are both tired with even this short gallop, being as yet not in training, and we feel the heat of the sun.

Sunday, December 15.—We have left the Leja country and are now in bare open fields, a fine district for farmers, but as uninteresting as the plains of Germany or northern France. These fields are better watered than the Leja, and we crossed several streams to-day by old stone bridges belonging to the Roman road. The streams run, I believe, eventually into the Jordan, and in one place form a marsh to the right of the road which Mohammed declared to be infested by robbers, men who lurk about in the tall reeds and when they have made a capture run off with their booty into it and cannot be followed. We saw nothing suspicious, however, nor anything of interest but a huge flock of sand grouse, of which we got four as they passed overhead. There were also immense clouds of starlings, and we started a hare. We passed many villages, the principal one being Shemskin, where

there are the ruins of an old town. Our road then bore away to the right, leaving the Roman road for good. This goes on straight to Bozra, the chief town of the Hauran in former days.

At Tafazz we stopped to pay a visit to some Tudmuri settled there, relations of Mohammed's but not on the Ibn Arûk side, very worthy people though hardly respectable as relations. Tafazz from the outside looks like a heap of ruins half smothered in dunghills. There has been a murrain among the cattle this year, and dead cows lay about in every stage of decomposition. We had some difficulty in groping our way through them to the wretched little mud hovel where the Tudmuri lived. The family consisted of two middle-aged men, brothers, with their mother, their wives, and a pretty daughter named Shemseh (sunshine), some children, and an old man, uncle or grandfather of the others. These were all presently clustering round us, and hugging and kissing Mohammed who, I must say, showed a complete absence of false pride in spite of his fine clothes and noble appearance. Their welcome to us, poor people, was very hearty; and in a few minutes coffee was being pounded, and a breakfast of unleavened loaves, thin and good, an omelette, buttermilk (lebben), and a sweet kind of treacle (dibs), made of raisins, prepared. While we were at breakfast a little starved colt looked in at the door from the yard; and some chickens and a

pretty fawn greyhound, all equally hungry I thought, watched us eagerly. The people were very doleful about the want of rain, and the loss of their yoke-oxen, which makes their next year's prospects gloomily uncertain. They told us, however, that they had a good stock of wheat in their underground granaries, sufficient for a year or even more, which shows a greater amount of forethought than I should have expected of them. In these countries it is quite necessary to provide against the famines which happen every few years, and in ancient times I believe it was a universal practice to keep a year's harvest in store.

After many entreaties that we would stay the night under their roof they at last suffered us to depart, promising that the men of the party would rejoin us the following day at Mezárib, for Mezárib was close by. There we arrived about three o'clock and are encamped on the piece of desert ground where the fair is held. The view from our tents is extremely pretty, a fine range of distant hills, the Ajlun to the south-west, and about a mile off a little lake looking very blue and bright, with a rather handsome ruined khan or castle in the foreground. To the left the tents of the Suk, mostly white and of the Turkish pattern. There are about a hundred and fifty of them in four rows, making a kind of street. The village of Mezárib stands on an island in the lake, connected by a stone causeway with the shore, but the Suk is on the

mainland. There is a great concourse of people with horses, and donkeys, and camels, and more are constantly coming from each quarter of the compass. They have not as yet paid much attention to us, so that we have been able to make ourselves comfortable. There is a fresh wind blowing from the south, and there is a look in the clouds of something like rain. I have never before wished for rain on a journey, but I do so heartily now; these poor people want it badly.

December 16.—To-day we have done nothing but receive visits. First there came a Haurani, who announced himself as a sheykh, and gave us the information that Sotamm ibn Shaalan and the Roala are somewhere near Ezrak. If this be true it will be a great piece of good luck for us, but other accounts have made it doubtful. A more interesting visitor was a young man, a native of Bereydeh in Nejd, who, hearing that we were on our way to Jôf, came to make friends with us. Though a well-mannered youth, he is evidently nothing particular in the way of position at home, and admits having been somebody's servant at Bagdad, but on the strength of a supposed descent from the Beni Laam in Nejd, he has claimed kinship with Mohammed and they have been sitting together affectionately all the morning, holding each an end of Mohammed's rosary. We have cross-questioned him about Nejd; but though he knows Haïl and Kasím and other places, he can give us little real informa-

tion. He seems to have left it as a boy. We are cheered, however, by the little he has had to tell us, as he seems to take it for granted that everybody in Nejd will be delighted to see us, and he has given us the name and address of his relations there.

Mohammed went last night to find out whether any of the Beni Sokkhr Sheykhs were at the Suk, for it is to them that we have letters from Mohammed Dukhi, and in the middle of the day Sákhn, a son of Fendi el-Faiz, the nominal head of the tribe, was introduced. He was a not ill-looking youth, and when we had shewn him our letter to his father informed us that the Sheykh had just arrived, so we sent him to fetch him. While Hanna was preparing coffee, the old man came to our tent. In person he is very different from any of the Ánazeh Sheykhs we have seen, reminding one rather of the Jiburi, or other Euphrates Arabs. The Beni Sokkhr are in fact of Shimali or Northern race, which is quite distinct from the Nejdi, to which both Ánazeh and Shammar belong. He is a fine picturesque old man, with rugged features and grey beard and an immense nose, which put us in mind of the conventional Arab types of Scripture picture books, and seemed to correspond with a suggestion I have heard made, that the Beni Sokkhr * are really the Beni Issachar, a lost tribe.

The Sheykh was very much "en cérémonie," and we found it difficult to carry on conversation with

* Sakhr, a stone—the real origin of their name.

him. Either he had not much to say, or did not care to say it to us; and the talk went on principally between his second son Tellál, a Christian merchant (here on business), and Mohammed. We did not, ourselves, broach the subject of our journey; but after coffee had been served, Mohammed had a private conversation with the Sheykh, which resulted in an invitation from him to his tents, which he described as being somewhere near Zerka on the Haj road, from which he will send us on to Maan, and ultimately to Jôf. This plan, however, does not at all suit Wilfrid, who is determined on exploring the Wady Sirhán, which no European has ever done, and he insists that we must go first to Ezrak. Fendi, it appears, cannot take us that way, as he is on bad terms with the Kreysheh, a branch of his own tribe who are on the road. Perhaps, too, he is afraid of the Roala. It is very perplexing, as some sort of introduction we must have at starting, and yet we cannot afford to go out of our way or even wait here indefinitely till Fendi is ready. The Jerdeh people are after all not expected for another two days, and it may be a week before they go on.

Later in the day Sottan, Fendi's youngest son, came to us and offered to accompany us himself to Jôf, but at a price which was altogether beyond our ideas. He had travelled once with some English people on the Syrian frontier, and had got foolish notions about money. Five pounds was the sum we had thought of giving; and he talked about a hundred.

So we sent him away. Later still, came a Shammar from the Jebel, who said he was willing to go for fifteen mejidies, and a Kreysheh who made similar offers. We have engaged them both, but neither could do more than show us the road. They would be no introduction. The difficulty, by all accounts, of going down the Wady Sirhán, is from the Sherarât, who hang about it, and who having no regular Sheykh, cannot easily be dealt with. They are afraid, however, of the Beni Sokkhr Sheykhs, and of course of Mohammed Dukhi and Ibn Shaalan; and if we could only get a proper representative of one or other of these to go with us, all would be right. But how to get such a one is the question.

It has been very hot and oppressive here to-day, and the appearance of rain is gone. The thermometer about noon stood at 86°.

December 17.—We have decided not to wait here any longer, but to go off to-morrow in the direction of Ezrak, trusting to find some one on the road. We shall have to pass through Bozra, and may have better luck there. Our Shammar seems to think it will be all right; but the Kreysheh came back this morning with a demand for thirty pounds, instead of the two pounds ten shillings, which he informed Mohammed, Fendi had told him to ask. He seems to be with Fendi, although his branch of the tribe are not on terms with their principal chief. He still talks, however, of coming on the original terms, but that will be without

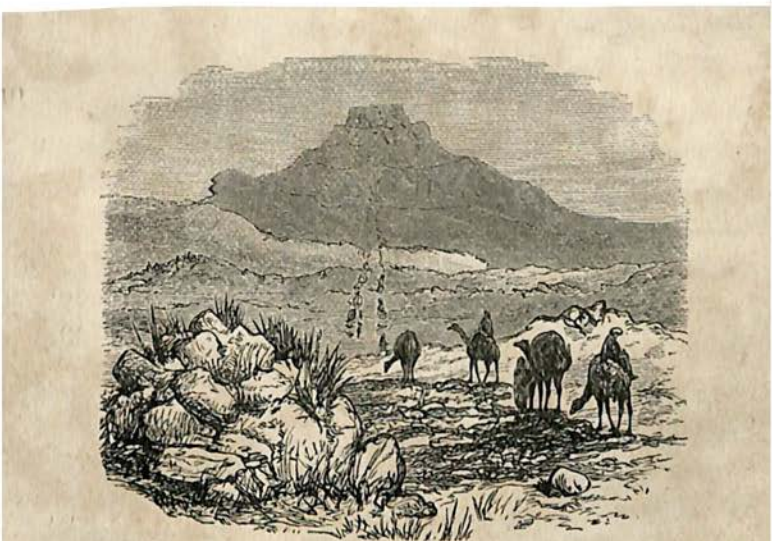
Fendi's permission. It is quite necessary to be, or appear to be stingy with these people, as throwing money away is considered by them the act of a simpleton.

Mohammed has been sent to the Suk to make some last purchases, and inquire about two more camels. Now that it is decided we are to go by the Wady Sirhán, we shall be obliged to buy two extra camels to carry food for the rest. In ordinary seasons this would not be necessary, but this year everybody tells us we shall find no pasture. *Alíek*, which is the camel food used at Damascus, is made of a sort of grain, like small misshapen peas or lentils, the husk green and the seed red. It is mixed up into dough with wheaten flour and water, and then kneaded into egg-shaped balls five inches long. Six of these balls are a camel's daily ration, which, if he can pick up any rubbish by the way, will be enough to keep him fat. We are carrying barley for the mares.

Aamar and Selim, our Taffazz relations, have come to pay us their promised visit, and will perhaps accompany us to-morrow. They brought with them a measure of *ferikeh*, wheat crushed very fine, a sort of burghul, some bread, and a couple of fowls; also Mohammed's sheepskin coat, which one of the women has been lining for him; and lastly, the little greyhound we saw at their house, all as a present, or very nearly so, after the fashion of the country.

Mohammed has come back with two camels for our approval, one a very handsome animal, but rather long-legged, the other short and broad-chested like a prize-fighter. We have paid ten pounds and eleven pounds for them. Nothing is absolutely settled about who is going and who is not going with us. Nothing but this, that we leave Mezárib to-morrow.

As I write, an immense hubbub and a cry of thieves from the Suk. They are ducking a man in the lake.



SALKHAD.

CHAPTER III.

"Rather proclaim it
That he which hath no stomach to this fight
Let him depart. His passport shall be made."
SHAKESPEARE.

Beating about—Bozra—We leave the Turkish dominions—Mohammed vows to kill a sheep—The citadel of Salkhad and the independent Druses—We are received by a Druse chieftain—Historical notice of the Hauran.

December 18.—Our caravan has lost some of its members. To begin with the two guides, the Kreysheh and the Shammar have failed to make their appearance. Then Abd er-Rahman, the little Agheyl, came with a petition to be allowed to go home. He was too young, he said, for such a journey, and afraid he might die on the road. He had brought a cousin with him as a substitute, who would do much better than himself, for the cousin was afraid of nothing. The substitute was then introduced, a wild picturesque creature all rags and elf locks and with eyes like jet, armed too with a matchlock rather longer than himself, and evidently no Agheyl. We have agreed, however, to take him and let the other go. Unwilling hands are worse than useless on a journey. Lastly, the slave Awwad has gone. Like most negroes he had too good an opinion of himself, and insisted on being treated as something more than a servant, and on having a

donkey to ride. So we have packed him too off. He was very angry when told to go, and broke a rebab we had given him to play on, for he could both play and sing well. We are now reduced to our two selves, Mohammed, Abdallah, Hanna, Ibrahim and the substitute—seven persons in all, but the Tafazz people are to go the first two days' march with us and help drive the camels.

We were glad to get clear of the dirt and noise of the Suk, and leaving the Haj road, took a cross track to the south-east, which is to lead us to Bozra. All day long we have been passing through a well-inhabited country, with plenty of villages and a rich red soil, already ploughed, every acre of it, and waiting only for rain. The road was full of people travelling on donkeyback and on foot to Mezárib, singing as they went along. In all the numerous villages we saw the effects of the late murrain in the dead cattle strewed about. I counted seventy carcasses in one small place, a terrible loss for the poor villagers, as each working cow or bullock was worth ten pounds. I asked what disease had killed them, and was told it was "min Allah" (from God). Mohammed, however, calls it *abu hadlan* (father of leanness).

This district is said to be the best corn-growing country anywhere, and looks like it, but unless rain falls soon, the year must be barren. The villages depend almost entirely on rain for their water supply. In each there is an old reservoir hollowed

out of the rock. It is difficult to understand how these tanks get filled, for they seem to have no drainage leading to them, being on the contrary perched up generally on high ground. They are now all dry, and the villagers have to send many miles for their drinking water. All this country belongs to the Hauran, and we are now in a Haurani village called Ghízeh. The people are evidently not pure Arabs, as many of them have light eyes.

We are being hospitably entertained by the village Sheykh, who is an old acquaintance of Mohammed's father's, and insists on setting all he has got before us,—coffee, a plate of rice, barley for the mares, and, what is more precious just now, water for them as well as for ourselves. Hassan, for such is his name, has a very pretty wife, who was among the crowd which gathered round us on our arrival at the village. She, like the women of all these villages, made no pretence of shyness, and was running about unveiled as any peasant girl might in Italy. She was evidently a spoilt child, and required more than one command from Hassan before she would go home. The Sheykh has been spending the evening with us. He is in great distress about his village, which is in the last straits for water. The cattle, as I have said, have all died, and now even the beasts of burden which have to go for the water are dying. The nearest spring is at Bozra, twelve miles off; and if the donkeys break down the village must die too of thirst. He

told us that a Frank passed this way two years ago, and had told him that there must be an ancient well somewhere among the ruins of which the village is built, and he has been looking for it ever since. He entreated us to tell him the most likely spot either for finding the old well or digging a new one. We are much distressed at not being engineers enough to do this for him; and I can't help thinking how much a real reformer (not a Midhat) might do in Turkey by attending to such crying wants as these. Ghízeh is within fifty miles from Damascus as the crow flies, and there are scores of villages in like condition throughout the Hauran, which a Syrian governor might relieve at the cost of sending round an engineer. But until tramways and railroads and new bazaars have been made, I suppose there is little chance for mere wells under the present *régime*.

Besides meat and drink, Hassan has given us useful advice. He has reminded Mohammed of another old friend of his father's, who he thinks might be of more service to us than anybody else could be, and he advises us to go first to him. This is Huseyn ibn Nejm el-Atrash, a powerful Druse Sheykh, who lives somewhere beyond the Hauran mountains. He must certainly have relations with some of the Bedouin tribes beyond, for it appears he lives in a little town quite on the extreme edge of the inhabited country towards the Wady Sirhán. We have always heard of this Druse country as

unsafe, but what country is not called unsafe outside the regular Turkish authority? The Ghízeh Sheykh's suggestion seems worth following, and we shall make for the Druse town.

The little greyhound Shiekhah (so called from a plant of that name) is very docile and well-behaved. She is a regular desert dog, and likes dates better than anything else. I have made her a coat to wear at night for she is chilly.

December 19.—Hassan with true hospitality did not leave his house this morning, but let us depart quietly. His coming to wish us good-bye would have looked like asking for a present, and he evidently did not wish for anything of the sort. This is the first time we have received hospitality absolutely gratis in a town, for even when staying with Mohammed's father at Tudmur, the women of the family had eagerly asked for money. In the desert, Hassan's behaviour would not have needed remark.

Before leaving Ghízeh we went to look at a house where there is a mosaic floor of old Roman work, scrolls with orange trees and pomegranates, vines with grapes on them, vases and baskets, all coloured on a white ground. It speaks well for the quality of the workmanship that it has so long stood the weather and the wear, for it is out of doors, and forms the pavement in the courtyard of a house.

Three and a half hours of steady marching brought us to Bozra, where we now are. The entrance of

the town is rather striking, as the old Roman road, which has run in a straight line for miles, terminates in a gateway of the regular classic style, beyond which lie a mass of ruins and pillars, and to the right a fine old castle. A raven was sitting on the gateway, and as we rode through solemnly said "caw."

Bozra is, I have no doubt, described by Mr. Murray, so I won't waste my time in writing about the ruins, which indeed we have not yet examined. They seem to be Roman, and in tolerable preservation. The castle is more modern, probably Saracenic, a huge pile built up out of older fragments. It is occupied by a small garrison of Turkish regulars, the last, I hope, we shall see for many a day, for Bozra is the frontier town of the Hauran, and beyond it the Sultan is not acknowledged. I believe that its occupation is not of older date than fifteen to twenty years ago, the time when Turkey made its last flicker as a progressing state, and that before that time the people of Bozra paid tribute to Ibn Shaalan, as they once had to the Wahhabis of Nejd. The Roala still keep up some connection with the town, however, for a shepherd we met at the springs just outside it assured us that Ibn Shaalan had watered his camels at them not two months ago. It was somewhere not far from Bozra that the forty days' battle between the Mesenneh and the Roala, described by Fatalla,* was fought. Though the

* This is a mistake, as the battle was fought on the banks of the Orontes.

details are no doubt exaggerated, Mohammed knows of the battle by tradition. Wilfrid asked him particularly about it to-day, and he fully confirms the account given by Fatalla of the downfall of the Mesenneh. He has added too some interesting details of their recent history. We are encamped outside the town at the edge of a great square tank of ancient masonry, now out of repair and dry. Here would be another excellent occupation for Midhat and his Circassians.

December 20.—We were disturbed all night by the barking of dogs, and the strange echoes from the ruined places round. I never heard anything so unearthly—a cold night—and melancholy too, as nights are when the moon rises late, and is then mixed up in a haggard light with the dawn.

The Tafazz relations are gone, very sorrowful to wish us good-bye. Selim, the elder of the two, told me that he has been thirty years now in the Hauran, and has no idea of going back to Tudmur. The land at Tafazz is so good that it will grow anything, while at Tudmur there are only the few gardens the stream waters. He is a *fellah* and likes ploughing and sowing better than camel driving. To Tafazz they are gone, Selim on his chestnut mare, old, worn, and one-eyed, but *asil;* Aamar on his bay Kehîleh from the Roala, also old and very lame. They went with tears in their

eyes, wishing us all possible blessings for the road.

The consequence is, we have to do more than our share of work, and have had a hard day loading and reloading the camels, for we were among the hills, and the roads were bad. The beasts have not yet become accustomed to each other, and the old camel we bought at Mezárib shows every sign of wishing to return there. He is an artful old wretch, and chose his moment for wandering off whenever we were looking the other way, and wherever a bit of uneven ground favoured his escape. Once or twice he very nearly gave us the slip. He wants to get back to his family, Abdallah says, for we bought him out of a herd where he was lord and master, a sultan among camels. Our road to-day has been very rough. We were told to make our way to Salkhad, a point on the far horizon, just on the ridge of the Hauran, and the only road there was the old Roman one. This went in an absolutely straight line over hill and dale, and as two out of every three of the stones paving it were missing, and the rest turned upside down, it was a long stumble from beginning to end. We had been warned to keep a good look-out for robbers, so Wilfrid and I rode ahead, reconnoitering every rock and heap. We passed one or two ruined villages, but met nobody all day long, still following the pointed hill of Salkhad, which, as we got nearer it, we could see was crowned by a huge fortress.

The country had now become a mass of boulders, which in places had been rolled into heaps, making gigantic cairns, not recently, but perhaps in ancient days, when there were giants in the land. The soil thus uncovered was a rich red earth, and here and there it had been cultivated. There was now a little pasture, for on the hills rain had fallen, and once we saw some goats in the distance.

As we approached Salkhad the road got so bad that Mohammed made a vow of killing a sheep if ever we got safe to Huseyn el-Atrash. We were amused at this and asked him what it meant; and he told us the story of the prophet Ibrahim who made a vow to kill his son, and who was prevented from doing so by the prophet Musa, who appeared to him and stopped him, and showed him two rams which he said would do instead. These vows the Arabs make are very curious, and are certainly a relic of the ancient sacrifices. Mohammed explained them to us. "The Bedouins," he said, "always do this when they are in difficulties," he could not say why, but it was an old custom; and when they go back home they kill the sheep, and eat it with their friends. He does not seem to consider it a religious ceremony, only a custom, but it is very singular.

Nine and a half hours' march from seven o'clock brought us to the foot of the conical hill, on which the fortress of Salkhad stands. This is a very ancient building, resembling not a little the fortress of Aleppo, a cone partly artificial and surrounded by a

moat, cased with smooth stone and surmounted by walls still nearly perfect. We remarked on some of them the same device as at Aleppo, a rampant lion, the emblem of the Persian Monarchy. The fortress itself, however, is probably of much older date, and may have existed at the time the children of Israel conquered the country. Wilfrid and I, who had gone on in front, agreed to separate here, and ride round the citadel, he to the right, and I to the left, and I was to wait on the top of the ridge till he gave me some signal. This I did and waited so long, that at last the camels came up. He in the meantime had found a little town just under the fortress on the other side and had ridden down into it. At first he saw nobody, and thought the place deserted, but presently people in white turbans began to appear on the house-tops, very much astonished to see this horseman come riding down upon them, for the road was like a stair. He saluted them, and they saluted politely in return, and answered his inquiry for Huseyn el-Atrash, by pointing out a path which led down across the hills to a town called Melakh, where they said Huseyn lived. They asked where he was going, and he said Bussora, Bussora of Bagdad, at which they laughed, and showing him the Roman road, which from Salkhad still goes on in a straight line about south-east, said that that would take him to it. This is curious, for it certainly is exactly the direction, and yet it is impossible there can ever have really been a road there. It probably goes to Ezrak

but we hope to find out all about this in a day or two. At the bottom of the hill Wilfrid beckoned to me, and I found him at a large artificial pool or reservoir, still containing a fair supply of water, and there, when the rest had joined us, we watered the camels and horses. Mohammed in the meanwhile had been also on a voyage of discovery, and came back with the news that Huseyn el-Atrash was really at Melakh, and Melakh was only two hours and a half further on.

Salkhad is a very picturesque town. It hangs something like a honeycomb under the old fortress on an extremely steep slope, the houses looking black from the colour of the volcanic stone of which they are built. Many of them are very ancient, and the rest are built up of ancient materials, and there is a square tower like the belfry of a church.* The tanks below are at least equally old with the town, having a casing of hewn stone, now much dilapidated, and large stone troughs for watering cattle. Its inhabitants, the people in the white turbans, are Druses, a colony sent I believe from the Lebanon after the disturbances in 1860.

From Salkhad our road lay principally down hill, for we had now crossed the watershed of the Jebel

* The Hauran was among the first districts conquered by the Caliph Omar. It shared for some centuries the prosperity of the Arabian Empire, but suffered severely during the Crusades. There is no reason, however, to doubt that it continued to be well inhabited until the conquest of Tamerlane in 1400, when all the lands on the desert frontier were depopulated.

Hauran, and became somewhat intricate, winding about among small fields. The country on this side the hills is divided into walled enclosures, formed by the rolling away of boulders, which give it a more European look than anything we have seen of late. These date I should think from very early times, for the stones have had time to get covered with a grey lichen, so as to resemble natural rather than artificial heaps, and in these dry climates lichen forms slowly. In some of the enclosures we found cultivation, and even vines and fig-trees. It is remarkable how much more prosperous the land looks as soon as one gets away from Turkish administration. The sun was setting as we first caught sight of Melakh, another strange old mediæval town of black stone, with walls and towers much out of the perpendicular; so leaving the camels to come on under Abdallah's charge and that of a man who had volunteered to guide us, we cantered on with Mohammed, and in the twilight arrived at the house of Huseyn el-Atrash.

Huseyn is a fine specimen of a Druse sheykh, a man of about forty, extremely dark and extremely handsome, his eyes made darker and more brilliant by being painted with kohl. This seems to be a general fashion here. He was very clean and well dressed in jíbbeh and abba; and, unlike most of the Druses, he wore a kefiyeh of purple and gold, though with the white turban over it in place of the aghal. He was sitting with his friends and

neighbours on a little terrace in front of his house, enjoying the coolness of the evening, while we could see that a fire had been lit indoors. He rose and came to meet us as we dismounted, and begged us to come in, and then the coffee pots and mortar were set at work and a dinner was ordered. The Sheykh's manners were excellent, very ceremonious but not cold, and though we conversed for an hour about "the weather and the crops," he carefully avoided asking questions as to who we were and what we wanted. Neither did we say anything, as we knew that the proper moment had not come. At last our camels arrived, and dinner was served, a most excellent one, chicken and burghul, horse-radishes in vinegar and water, several sweet dishes, one a purée of rice, spiced tea, cream cheese, and the best water-melon ever tasted. The cookery and the people remind us of the frontier towns of the Sahara, everything good of its kind, good food, good manners, and good welcome. Then, when we had all eaten heartily down to the last servant, he asked us who we were. Mohammed's answer that we were English persons of distinction, on our way to Jôf, and that he was Mohammed, the son of Abdallah of Tudmur, made quite a *coup de théâtre*, and it is easy to see that we have at last come to the right place. We have been, however, glad to retire early, for we have had a hard day's march, nearly twelve hours, and over exceedingly bad ground.

December 21.—The shortest day of the year, but still hot, though the night was cold.

We spent the morning with Huseyn. His house has not long been built, but it looks old because it is built of old stones. Its construction is simple but good, the main room being divided into sections with arches so as to suit the stone rafters with which it is roofed. In front there is a pleasant terrace overlooking an agreeable prospect of broken ground, with glimpses of the desert beyond. While Wilfrid was talking to Huseyn I went to see the ladies of the establishment. Huseyn has only one wife; her name is Wardi (a rose). She is the mother of a nice little boy, Mohammed, about six years old and very well behaved, whom we had seen with the Sheykh; and of a pretty little girl of two, named Amina. There are, besides, some older children by a former husband. Wardi is rather fat, with a brilliant complexion and well-kohled eyes and eyebrows; she has good manners, and received me very cordially in a room opening on to a terrace, with a beautiful view eastward of some tells at the edge of the Hamad. She sat surrounded by dependants and relations, among whom were Huseyn's mother and her own. The former was suffering from cough and loss of voice, and another member of the family complained of a rheumatic arm; both wanted me to advise them as to treatment. The ladies would not uncover their faces until Assad, the Sheykh's secretary, who accompanied

me, had retired. Wardi's concealment of her features was, however, a mere make-believe, only a corner of her head veil pulled half across her face. She talked a great deal about her children of the former marriage, Mustafa a son of eighteen, who is chief of a neighbouring village, and a daughter of perhaps twelve who was present. This young girl seemed particularly intelligent and had received some education; enough to read out a phrase from my Arabic exercise book, and to repeat the first chapter of the Koran. The pleasure of my visit was somewhat marred by the quantity of sweetmeats and tea and coffee served; with the tea and coffee I got on very well, as the cups were of the usual small size, but the sugar-plums were of so massive a kind that it was impossible to swallow them. The two small children fortunately came to my rescue; and by their zeal in devouring everything I handed to them, took off their mother's attention from my shortcomings. At parting Wardi gave me a bunch of feathers pulled then and there out of an ostrich skin hanging up against the wall; the skin, she said, had been brought to her some months before, from somewhere in the south.

The Druses of the Hauran say that they are Arabs who came here with the immediate successors of the prophet from the south; that the Jebel was at that time inhabited by Rûmi (Greeks), whose descendants still live here and are Christians. We saw one of them in Huseyn's house to-day, appa-

rently on excellent terms with the other visitors. He was dressed like an Arab, and was undistinguishable from the ordinary felláhín Arabs one sees in the desert towns. The Druse women, except those of Huseyn's family, go about unveiled. They are particularly well-mannered and civil, with clean fresh complexions and bright coloured cheeks, and always say "Salam aleykum" to travellers. They all kohl their eyes carefully and broadly.

There has of course been much discussion about our further journey. It is rather aggravating to think that a whole week has passed since we left Damascus, and yet we are not, as the crow flies, more than eighty miles on our way. Still there seems a chance now of our really getting forward, for Huseyn promises to send some men with us to Kâf, an oasis in the Wady Sirhán, with which there is occasional communication on this side of the Hauran, as there are salt beds to which the villagers send camels to fetch salt. They say it is about five days' journey from here. The principal difficulty is that there are several Bedouin tribes on the road, and nobody knows which. The Sirdíeh are friends of Huseyn's, and so are the Kreysheh, but there are others whom he does not know, Sherarât Sirhán and Howeysin, the last mere thieves "worse than the Sleb." Any or all of these may be met with, though it is very possible we may meet nobody. Huseyn has sent a man on horseback to Ezrak, the first stage on our way, where there are

wells and an old castle, to find out who is there. The Kreysheh we have letters to, from Mohammed Dukhi, and if we can find them there will be no more difficulty, as they are strong enough to give us protection from the rest. At any rate we go on to-morrow. We are anxious to get away to the desert, for life is very fatiguing in these towns; there are so many people to be civil to, and the children make such a noise. They have been playing hockey all day long just outside our tent, tiresome little wretches. Wilfrid went out for an hour this afternoon, and got some grouse, of which there are immense flocks all about the fields, while I made a picture of the town from behind a wall.

We have at last got a man to go with us as servant, who looks promising. He is a Shammari from Jebel Shammar who, for some reason or other, has left his own tribe (probably for some crime against Bedouin law), and has been settled for the last few years at Salkhad, where he has married a Druse woman. There is some mystery about his profession and way of life, but he has an attractive face, and in spite of very poor clothes a certain air of distinction. We both like him, and Huseyn seems to know something about him. Besides, he has made the whole journey from Nejd already, and has been backwards and forwards between Salkhad and Jôf more than once. He wants now, he says, to go back to his own country. Mohammed has also discovered a red-

headed man, a native of Sokhne and as such almost a fellow countryman, who will come as camel driver under Abdallah; so that our complement of hands is made up to its original number, eight.

To-morrow we may hope to sleep in the desert.

Note.—Alas, since this was written, our friends at Melakh have experienced sad reverses. In September, 1879, Midhat Pasha, to signalize his assumption of office at Damascus, and support that reputation of energy which Europe has given him, sent an armed force to coerce the independent Druses. At first these, fighting for their liberty, were successful. They met and defeated the Turkish troops advancing through the Leja, and the expedition returned with a loss of 400 men. A month later, however, Midhat retrieved his fortunes. He bribed or persuaded Mohammed Dukhi to overrun the Eastern Hauran with his Bedouins, and while these were blockading the towns, marched a second column of regular troops through the mountains, and so gained possession of Salkhad, Melakh, and the rest, reducing all to submission. An Ottoman Governor now replaces the native Sheykhs, and the blessings of the Sultan's rule have been extended to every village of the Hauran.

RUN TO EARTH.

CHAPTER IV.

"For all is rocks at random thrown,
Black walls of crag, black banks of stone."
SCOTT.

We start in earnest—The Harra—A Theory of Mirage—Camp of the Beni Sokkhr—Wady er Rajel—A Christmas Dinner in the Desert—Sand storm—We reach Kâf.

December 22.—A white frost, and off at half-past seven. Huseyn has sent two men with us, Assad, his head man, and another. We have also letters from him for Ali el-Kreysheh, and the Sheykh of Kâf.

Mohammed as we rode away was much elated at the success of this visit, and related to me the pretty things Huseyn had said about us. Huseyn had seen other franjis but none who understood the *shoghl Arab*, Arab ways, as we did. They had come with an escort to see the ruins, but we had come to see him. "Ah," said Mohammed, "now they are sitting drinking coffee and talking about us. They are saying to each other that the Beg and I are brothers, and we are travelling together, as is right, in search of relations, and to make friends all over the world. There is nothing so *asil* (noble) as to travel and make friends. Once upon a time

there was an old man who had a son, but very little other property, and when he came to die he called his son and said to him, "O my son, I am about to die, and I have nothing to leave behind me for your good but advice, and my advice is this: 'Build to yourself houses in every part of the world.' And the son, who was a child without understanding, wondered how he was to do this, seeing he had no money to build houses with, and so set out on a journey in search of a wise man who could explain to him his father's last words. And he travelled for many years and visited every part of the world, and made friends in each town, and at last he found the wise man who told him that he had already done as his father had bidden him, "for," he said, "you have friends everywhere, and is not your friend's house your own?"

We too were in high spirits, as everything now seemed to be going right. Our course lay nearly south on the road to Ezrak, and we passed several ruined villages and some cultivated land. Every now and then we put up immense packs of sand-grouse, which were busy feeding on the seeds of the *zueyti*, a kind of thistle which grows abundantly on the fallows. Wilfrid got eight of them at a shot, and at one of the villages we bought ten partridges of a man who had been out with a matchlock, so that we are well supplied with meat for a couple of days. Assad has got a very handsome greyhound

with him, of the long-haired breed, which has a wonderful nose for game. His master declares he *sees* the birds, for the Arabs do not seem to understand the theory of scent.

After two hours' fair travelling, we stopped at a village called Metém, where Assad had friends, and where we were obliged to go through the ceremony of drinking coffee, losing much time thereby. Then a new discussion arose as to our road, somebody having just come in from Ezrak, who announced that the Sirhan were camped there, and the Sirhan we knew were friendly with Huseyn el-Atrash. Assad, and Salman his companion, refused in consequence to go that way, and were for stopping the night at Metém to think over it; but this we would not listen to. We were determined to go somewhere, and if not to Ezrak then by some other route to Kâf. Somebody suggested El Kreysheh, who was said to be in the Wady er-Rajel, and others the Sirdíeh, who were camped a day's journey towards the east. It was difficult to decide; but at the well of the village while we were watering our animals, we met a man and his wife, who told us they knew where to find the Sirdíeh, and were themselves on their way to join them. So this decided us, and we determined on the Sirdíeh. The Sirdíeh are friends of Huseyn's, and our Druse guides made no objection to going that way; Awwad the Shammari declared also that it was all right. Accordingly we left the Ezrak road,

and striking off to the east, soon found ourselves out of the range of cultivation. Metém is to be the last village we shall see, and the desert is now before us all the way to Nejd.

We are encamped at the edge of a plateau, from which there is an immense prospect of hill and plain, and Wilfrid has been very busy making out a rough chart of the different landmarks, as they may be useful to-morrow if we should happen to miss our way. The man and woman we met at the well are with us, and know the different points by name. Awwad too, declares he knows every part of the desert between this and Kâf, and he has pointed out a tell, south-east by south, beyond which it lies. The Druses, like townsmen, are already nervous at the sight of the desert, and angry with us for camping away from villages and tents. Our camp is well concealed in an old volcanic crater, where also we are sheltered from the wind, which is very cold. There is a spring just below called Ain el-Ghiaour (the infidel's spring); according to the Druses, the scene of a great battle fought by the Arabs of the first invasion, in which they routed the Christians. At that time all the country we have been passing through, and perhaps the broken ground in front of us, was well inhabited; and there is a tell with a ruined convent on it not far off to the north-west, still known as Ed Deyr. There is capital pasture here, *rotha*, which the camels have been making the most of. We too

have dined, and now all is quiet, and the sky is full of stars. We have been sitting on the edge of the crater talking over plans for to-morrow. The Sirdíeh, it now appears, are at a *khabra* or pool, called Shubboitia, which we could see before the sun set like a yellow line far away to the north-east, too far out of our road for us to go there. Awwad is in favour of going straight to Kâf, and taking our chance of what Arabs we may meet. El Kreysheh is somewhere in front of us, and so they say is Ibn Majil, the Akíd of the Roala, whom we met last year. At any rate, we must take a good supply of water with us, and go forward at the first streak of dawn.

December 23.—As soon as it was light we climbed up to the top of the crater and looked over the plain. It was a wonderful sight with its broken tells and strange chaotic wadys, all black with volcanic boulders, looking blacker still against the yellow morning sky. There is always something mysterious about a great plain, and especially such a plain as this, where Europeans, one may say, have never been, and which even the people of the Hauran know little of. Besides, it seems to have had a history if only in the days of Og, king of Basan. But it was not to look at the view or for any romantic reason that we had come there; only to examine the country before us and see if we could discover traces of Arab encampments. After looking carefully all round we at

last made out a thin column of smoke to the north-east, ten or twelve miles away, and another nearly due east. The first must be the Sirdíeh, the second perhaps the Kreysheh. Satisfied with this we returned to our party, who were just setting the camels in motion, and as the sun rose we began our march.

We have been stumbling about all day among the boulders of the Harra, following little tracks just wide enough for the camels to get along, and making a great circuit in order to find ourselves at last barely twelve miles from where we began. At first we kept company with our new acquaintances, the people going to the Sirdíeh, but when we had arrived at the foot of the hills we found them turning away to the north, and so wished them good-bye, much to the Druses' disgust, who did not at all relish our wild-goose chase of the Kreysheh, and still less the idea of going straight to Kâf. They followed, however, when they found that we would listen to no reason, and I must say good-humouredly. One great charm of the Arab character is that it bears no malice, even about trifles. Sulkiness is very rare with them. They did not pretend to know much of the country, so we made Awwad lead the way. Going straight was out of the question, for the Harra is an impracticable country, not only for camels but for horses, on account of the boulders, except just where the paths lead. We had a bleak desolate ride, for a cold wind had sprung up in our faces with a decided

touch of winter. This country must be a furnace, however, in summer with its polished black stones. I noticed that these were very regularly weathered; one side, that towards the north, being grey with a sort of lichen, so that as we rode past they seemed to change colour continually. There was very little sign of life in this region, only a few small birds, and no trace of inhabitants or of any recent passers by. The tracks followed generally the beds of wadys, and wandered on without any particular aim or direction. They looked like the paths made by sheep or camels, only that the stones were so big it seemed impossible that the mere passage of animals could have ever made them. On the whole I think they must be artificial, made by shepherds in very ancient times for their flocks. In the spring, we are told, the whole of this Harra is excellent grazing ground. It is a curious thing that every here and there in the hollows there is a space free from stones where water lies after rain, forming a pool. Why are there no stones there? The soil is a dry clay with a highly glazed surface cracked into very regular squares, so glazed indeed that even close by it has the appearance of water, reflecting the light of the sky. This, no doubt, is the way some of the curious mirage effects are produced in the desert, for it is to be noticed that the most perfect delusions are found just in places where one would naturally expect to find water—that is, where water has been.

At half-past twelve, we came suddenly on a level bit of open ground, which we took at first for one of these khabras, but found it to be part of a long wady running north and south, with a very distinct watercourse in the middle, with tamarisk bushes, and patches of fresh grass, showing that water had run down it not long ago. Both Awwad and the Druses recognised this as the Wady-er-Rajel, where the Kreysheh were reported to be encamped, and the only question was, whether to turn up or down it. While we were debating, however, a flock of sheep was sighted, and presently a boy, who told us he was a Sirdíeh, but that the Kreysheh were only a couple of hours further down the valley. This just suited, as it was exactly in the right direction for us, and we are now at Ali el-Kreysheh's camp, and being hospitably entertained by a young relation in the Sheykh's absence. Ali is away at Mezárib with fifty horsemen, to escort the Jerdeh on their way to Maan.

We have had some singing to-night, and playing of the rebab. Among the songs I was pleased to recognise an old Shammar ballad about Abdul Kerim and the man who had no mare.

December 24.—The Kreysheh, at whose camp we now are, belong to the Beni Sokkhr, a large, but not very warlike tribe, which occupies the whole of the district from the pilgrim road eastwards to the extreme edge of the Harra, throughout a wilderness of stones. To this they are said to owe

their name of Beni Sokkhr, children of the rocks; and they assure us that they have lived in the Harra "from all time." They do not come from Nejd, they say, like the Ánazeh, but are Shimali or Northern Arabs. We were told the names of ten divisions into which the Beni Sokkhr have ramified, each owning a separate Sheykh, though nominally subject to Fendi el-Faïz, or rather his son Sóttan, for Fendi is old and has given up practical authority. These divisions are probably nothing more than groups of the tribe, as their names are those of their Sheykhs, the principal being Sóttan, and next to him El Kreysheh, and next again Ed Dreybi ibn Zebbed. The Kreysheh have camels as well as sheep, and seem pretty well off; but they have no great number of mares, and those not of the best type. They keep hawks and greyhounds.

They have given us news of the Roala. Ibn Majil, whom we met last year at Sotamm Ibn Shaalan's, and who took our side in the negociations for peace with the Sebaa, has now separated from Sotamm, and is somewhere down by Jôf, so perhaps we may meet him; while Sotamm has just marched north again to attack the Welled Ali. The Kreysheh are friends with Ibn Majil, but at war with Sotamm, another curious instance of the inconsistencies of Bedouin politics. These are, indeed, as changing as the clouds in the sky, and transform themselves so rapidly, that in Desert history, if it were written,

ten years would comprise as much incident as a century in Europe.

While negotiations were going on about arrangements for our further progress, I went to call on Ali el-Kreysheh's wives. There are two of them, Hazna and Fassal; but I only saw the latter, who had the women's tent to herself with her attendants and three children, two little boys and a girl, remarkably dirty, and (what is rare among Bedouins) suffering from sore eyes. Fassal was plain and uninteresting but sensible, and I daresay has the advantage over Hazna, who, poor thing, is childless. She told me she was from a section of the tribe further north, and took an interest in Damascus, asking about the new Valy as well as about Mohammed ibn Smeyr, who is the great name in these parts. She seemed much pleased with the box of sugar-plums I gave her, and when I went away followed me as far as the end of the tent ropes invoking blessings on my head.

I found our own tents down and everything ready for a start; for an arrangement had been come to with the young man representing our host, that we were to have a *zellem* (person) to go with us as far as Kâf for the sum of ten mejidies (forty shillings). Assad and Salman were just saying good-bye, for they had to go back to Melakh. They were made very happy with a Turkish pound apiece, and Assad has left us his greyhound, the black and

tan dog, who whined piteously when his master went away. I like the dog for this.

As we left the Kreysheh camp a bitter wind sprang up from the west-south-west, and continued all day long, chilling us, in spite of all the furs and cloaks we could put on, to the bone. Our course lay nearly across it south-south-east. We are out of the hills now in a nearly level plain still covered with the black stones. The only variety during the day was when we came to a large khabra (Khabra-el-Gurrthi), a dreary flat of dried up clay and sand which we took two hours to cross, though we went at the camels' best pace. The wind drove great clouds of sand across it, making it one of the dreariest places I ever saw. We were all too cold for much talking, and sat huddled up on our delúls with our backs to the wind, and our heads wrapped up in our cloaks. We met no one all day long, except one string of a dozen camels driven by two very wild-looking Arabs who told us they were Sherarât, and nothing living except a hare which got up among the stones, and which the dogs coursed for some hundreds of yards, over ground which would have broken every bone of an English greyhound, apparently without hurting themselves. About two o'clock we came, to our great delight, upon the Wady er-Rajel again, an angle of whose course we had been cutting off. Here we found beautiful soft ground and grass and pools of water, for this wady had running water in it last month,

and is not quite drunk up yet. The pasture was too good to be passed, so here we remain for the night. Just as we were unloading, a little troop of gazelles looked over the edge of the wady, perhaps come for water, and Mohammed set off in pursuit with a Winchester rifle. We heard him fire all the twelve shots one after the other, but he came back empty-handed. Our tent is set under the lee of a rough wall of loose stones, such as are set up by the shepherds as a shelter for their flocks. The wind still blows tempestuously, and it is cold as a Christmas Eve need be. But Hanna has made us a capital curry, which with soup and burghul and a plum-pudding from a tin, makes not a bad dinner, while Abdallah has distinguished himself baking bread, and Awwad roasting coffee.

Wednesday, December 25.—Christmas Day. We are out of the Harra at last, and on open ground. That black wilderness had become like a nightmare with its horrible boulders and little tortuous paths, which prevented the camels from doing more than about two miles an hour. Now we are able to push on at three, or three and a quarter.

After floundering down the wady for half an hour, we came to some splendid pools in a narrow cleft of rock, where we stopped to take in water. We have been very fortunate in such a season as this to find the Wady er-Rajel full. The rain which filled it must have been some isolated water-spout on the eastern slope of Jebel Hauran, for not

a drop fell anywhere else; and there is no autumn grass except just along its edge. It is rapidly drying, or rather being drunk up, and the little vegetation is very closely eaten down. In the smaller pools there is a very distinct flavour of sheep and camels in the water; but at the pools we came to this morning it is still pure. The Kreysheh have been all up this valley, eating and drinking their way, and leaving not a blade they could help behind them, and we have come upon numerous tracks of their cattle. Every here and there we have passed the traces of their camps, stones set in line on three sides of a square; one we saw had been only just deserted, and we put up a number of vultures and ravens from the fresh carcase of a camel lying by it. There crossed it also the foot-print of a horse, which brought on the usual talk of ghazús and marauders, in which our people delight. They, however, have settled it among them to their satisfaction, that such accidents as meeting robbers or people of a hostile tribe are "min Allah" (from God), to be classed with the rain and fine weather, and sickness and good health, all which things the Bedouins consider fortuitous.

Having filled our goat skins, we left the Wady er-Rajel for good, and are to come across no more water now till we get to Kâf. The valley takes a turn here to the west before it reaches the Wady Sirhán, and would therefore be out of our road. We have been crossing some rolling downs covered

with light flinty gravel, a delightful change from the Harra, and have had a gallop or two after the gazelles, which now and then came in sight. We thought too of our Christmas dinner, and how glad we should be to get some addition to the rice, which was all we had; but neither greyhounds nor mares were in good enough condition to run down their quarry. Once we made a rather successful stalk, and a charge in among a small herd, but the dogs could not get hold of anything, and, though several shots were fired, nothing came to bag. Then we had a long gallop after Sayad, the black and tan greyhound, who went on after the gazelles for a good two miles, so that we were afraid of losing him; and then another long gallop to get back to our camels. This time, we had been three quarters of an hour away from them, and we found our people all much alarmed, Abdallah rather angry at our going so far, for Mohammed was with us. He was perfectly in the right, and we were to blame, for we are on a serious journey not a sporting tour; and to say nothing of danger from enemies, there is always a certain risk of missing one another in a country like this where camels leave no track behind them. A turn to right or left out of the direct line and a fold in the ground, and they are lost. So we apologised, and promised to do so again no more. We were, however, in a most unexpected manner provided with dinner; for while we were still talking, behold a grazing camel

all alone on the plain, not a mile away; when with a general shout of "a prize," the whole party on horseback and on foot rushed in pursuit. We were naturally the first up, and drove the animal at a canter to the others. The camel was a young one of last spring, in good condition, and at the sight tears rushed into Hanna's eyes—tears of hunger, not of pity. I am afraid indeed that none of the party had much thought of pity, and the scene caused me mixed feelings of compassion for the poor victim, and disgust at ourselves who were waiting to prey upon it. No question was raised as to ownership; camels found astray in desert places were by acclamation declared the property of the first comer. We were in fact a ghazú, and this was our lawful prize. So the poor little camel was driven on before us.

Dinner is thus secured, and I must see what else can be arranged in honour of the occasion.

December 26.—Mohammed, Abdallah, Awwad, the two Ibrahims and Hanna, all of them, spent the evening in feasting and ate up the whole of the camel except the short ribs, which were set before us, and the shoulders which were kept for to-day. They divided among them the labour of killing, skinning and quartering, and cooking it, for all were equally ready to lend a hand to the work. People talk sometimes of camel meat, as if it were something not only unpalatable, but offensive. But it is in reality very good; when young it resembles mutton, even when old it is only tough, and never

has any unpleasant taste as far as my experience goes; indeed if served up without the bones it could hardly be distinguished from mutton.

The servants having thus feasted were all soon sound asleep, and even when suddenly, between two and three in the morning, the wind rose with a deafening noise, they did not wake, not till their tent blew down upon them as ours did upon us. We were awake and might have kept our tent standing had we not been too lazy to get up and drive in the pegs. It was too late when the tent had fallen on us to do anything but lie as well as we could beneath the ruins and wait for daylight. Fortunately the main pegs had not drawn, and the sand, for this hurricane was a sand storm, soon covered over the edges of the fallen tent, and no further damage was done. In the morning, the servants proposed staying where we were; but we would not hear of this, as we had water for only two days, and it would have been folly to dawdle, so after rubbing the sand out of or rather into our eyes, we set to work packing and loading. The wind continued violent and bitterly cold, and carried a great deal of sand with it. It came from the west-south-west. We had camped under shelter at a small tell close to the Tell Guteyfi, which proved to be the same as one pointed out to us by Awwad from Ain el-Giaour, and once beyond it, we found ourselves on a perfectly open bit of plain, exposed to the full fury of the gale, now more violent than

ever. Sand storms are evidently common here, for the Tell Guteyfi, which is of black volcanic boulders like the Harra, is half smothered in sand. We saw it looming near us in the thick air, and soon after were almost hidden from each other in the increasing darkness. The sun shone feebly at intervals through the driving sand, but it was all we could do to keep the caravan together, and not lose sight of each other. At one moment we had all to stop and turn tail to the wind, covering our eyes and heads with our cloaks, waiting till the burst was over. Nothing could have faced it. Still we were far from having any idea of danger, for there really is none in these storms, and had plenty of time to notice how very picturesque the situation was, the camels driven along at speed, all huddled together for protection, with their long necks stretched out, and heads low, tags and ropes flying, and the men's cloaks streaming in the wind, all seen through the yellow haze of sand which made them look as though walking in the air. The beasts looked gigantic yet helpless, like antediluvian creatures overwhelmed in a flood. Still, as I said, there was no danger, for the wind was steady in its direction, and our course was directly across it—that we knew—and by patiently struggling on, we managed to get over a deal of ground. Suddenly the sandy plain over which we were travelling, seemed to sink away in front of us, and at the bottom of a steep dip we could see clumps of

SAND STORM IN THE WADY-ER-RAJEL.

Vol. I., p. 80.

tamarisk looming through the storm. We knew that a refuge was at hand.

Here then we are comfortably housed under one of these bushes, where there is a delightful lull. The soil is all deep sand, white as snow, and the tent which we have rigged up is already half buried in it, so that we might imagine ourselves at home snowed up on Boxing Day. We have made a fire of tarfa sticks inside the tent, and have been enjoying Hanna's delicious coffee. Where is one ever so much at home as in one's own tent? Awwad surprised us very much to-day by objecting, when we proposed to pitch the tent, that it would be impossible to do so in the sand. If Mohammed or any of the townspeople had done so it would have been natural, but Awwad is a Bedouin born, and must have pitched camp hundreds of times in the Nefúd. Yet he had never heard of burying a tent peg.

One misfortune has happened in the storm. The old rogue of a camel we bought at Mezárib, who has been trying all along to get back to his family, has given us the slip. Taking advantage of the darkness, and knowing that the wind would obliterate his track at once, he decamped as soon as unloaded, and is gone. Mohammed and Awwad, each on a delúl, are scouring the country, but without a chance of finding him; for at best they can only see things a hundred yards off, and he was not missed for the first half hour. Mohammed has vowed to kill a lamb, but I fear that will do no good.

December 27.—We have arrived at Kâf after a long march, twenty-seven or twenty-eight miles. Course about south-east.

In the night a little rain fell, and the wind moderated. At eight o'clock we started, crossing a wide plain of coarse sand interspersed with low sandstone tells. At noon we came upon a well-marked track, the road of the salt caravans between Bozra and Kâf, which, after crossing a rather high ridge, brought us to a very curious valley; an offshoot, we were told, of the Wady Sirhán. The geological formation of this is singular; the crest of the ridge on either side the valley is of black rock with detached stones of the same—then yellow sandstone, then another black layer, then pure sand, then sand with isolated black stones, then a calcareous deposit, and at the bottom chalk. The actual bed of the wady is a fine white sand sprinkled over with tamarisk and guttub bushes. As we were crossing this our dogs started a jerboa, and, little creature though it is, it gave them much trouble to catch it. Its hops were prodigious, and from side to side and backwards and forwards, so that the dogs always ran over it, and snatching, always missed it; till at last, as if by accident, it jumped into Shiekhah's mouth. Abdallah and the rest were very anxious to eat it, but it was so mauled as to be beyond cooking. At three o'clock we crested another ridge, and from it suddenly came in sight of the great Wady Sirhán, the object of so many of

our conjectures. It seems, however, to be no wady, but the bed of an ancient sea. A little black dot on the edge of a *subbka* or salt lake, now dry, and just under a tall black tell, marked the oasis of Kâf, an infinitesimal village of sixteen houses, and a palm garden of about an acre.

I have had the misfortune to sprain my knee, an awkward accident, and very annoying in the middle of a journey. My delúl, always a fidgety animal, gave a bolt just as I was leaning over to arrange something on the off side of the *shedád*, or saddle, and pitched me off. The pain is indescribable, and I fear I shall be helplessly lame for some time to come. But here we are at Kâf.

KAF.

CHAPTER V.

"Rafi ran after her with his sword drawn, and was just about to strike off her head, when she cried 'quarter.'"—ABULFEDA.

Kâf and Itheri—More relations—The Wady Sirhán—Locust hunting—Hanna sits down to die—Tales of robbery and violence—We are surprised by a ghazú and made prisoners—Sherarât statistics—Jôf.

December 28.—Kâf is a pretty little village, with a character of its own, quite distinct from anything one sees in Syria. All is in miniature, the sixteen little square houses, the little battlemented towers and battlemented walls seven feet high—seventy or eighty palm trees in a garden watered from wells, and some trees I took at first for cypresses, but which turned out to be a very delicate kind of tamarisk.* Though so small a place, Kâf has a singularly flourishing look, all is neat there and in good repair, not a battlement broken or a door off its hinges, as would certainly have been the case in Syria. There are also a good many young palms planted in among the older ones, and young fig trees and vines, things hardly ever found in the North. The people are nice looking

* The *Ithel*, a tree grown in every villa e of Central Arabia, but not, as far as I know, found there wild.

and well behaved, though at first they startled us a little by going about all of them with swords in their hands. These they hold either sloped over their shoulders or grasped in both hands by the scabbard, much as one sees in the old stone figures of mediæval martyrs, or in the effigies of crusaders.

Abdallah el-Kamis, Sheykh of the village, to whom we had letters from Huseyn, received us with great politeness; and a room in his house was swept out for our use. Like all the other rooms, it opened on to the court-yard, in the middle of which was tethered a two-year-old colt. Our room had been a storing place for wood, and was without furniture of any sort, but we were delighted to find also without inhabitants. The architecture here is very simple, plain mud walls with no windows or openings of any kind except a few square holes near the roof. The roof was of *ithel* beams with cross rafters of palm, thatched in with palm branches. The principal room is called the kahwah or coffee room; and in it there is a square hearth at the side or in the middle for coffee-making. There is no chimney, and the smoke escapes as it can; but this is not so uncomfortable as it sounds, for the wood burnt here burns with a beautiful bright flame, giving out a maximum of heat to a minimum of smoke. It is the *ratha* or *ghada*.* People sit round the hearth while coffee is being made, a solemn process occupying nearly half an hour.

* A kind of tamarisk.

As soon as we arrived, a trencher of dates was brought, dates of the last year's crop, all sticky and mashed up, but good; and later in the evening, we had a more regular dinner of burghul and boiled fowls. We are much struck with the politeness of everybody. Abdallah, our host, asked us at least twenty times after our health before he would go on to anything else; and it was not easy to find appropriate compliments in return. Everything of course is very poor and very simple, but one cannot help feeling that one is among civilized people. They have been making a great fuss with Mohammed, who is treated as a sheykh. Tudmur is well known by name, and at this distance is considered an important town. Much surprise was expressed at finding a man of his rank in the semi-menial position Mohammed holds with us, and he was put to some polite cross-questioning in the evening as to the motive of his journey. No Franjis have ever been seen at Kâf before, so the people say; and they do not understand the respect in which Europeans are held elsewhere. Mohammed, however, has explained his "brotherhood with the Beg," and protested that his journey is one of honour, not of profit; so that we are treated with as much courtesy as if we were Arabs born. Awwad the Shammar has been of great use to us, as he is well known here, and he serves as an introduction.

Kâf is quite independent of the Sultan, though it has twice been sacked by Turkish soldiers, once

under Ibrahim Pasha in 1834, and again only a few years ago, when the Government of Damascus sent a military expedition down the Wady Sirhán. We were shown the ruins of a castle, Kasr es-Saïd, on a hill above the town which the former destroyed, and we heard much lamentation over the proceedings of the latter. The inhabitants of Kâf acknowledge themselves subjects of Ibn Rashid, the Jebel Shammar chief, some of whose people were here only a few days since, taking the annual tribute, a very small sum, twenty mejidies (£4), which they are glad to pay in return for his protection. They are very enthusiastic about "the Emir," as they call him, and certainly have no reason to wish for annexation to Syria. The little town of Kâf and its neighbour Itheri, where we now are, have commercially more connection with the north than with the south, for their principal wealth, such as it is, arises from the salt trade with Bozra. Abdallah el-Kamis seems to be well off, for he possesses several slaves, and has more than one wife. But the colt I have mentioned is his only four-footed possession; he would have come with us, he said, if he had owned a delûl. I noticed a few camels and donkeys and goats about the village.

Makbul, the Kreysheh, has gone back, and we now want to find a Sherâri to take us on to Jôf. We have come on to Itheri, Kâf's twin oasis, two and a half hours east of it, also in the Wady Sirhán. This is not marked on many of the modern

maps, though Chesney has it incorrectly placed on his. We find by the barometer that they are both on the same level, so that our conjecture seems confirmed, about the Wady Sirhán having no slope. The Wady Sirhán is a curious chaotic depression, probably the bed of some ancient sea like the Dead Sea, and is here about twelve miles broad if we can judge by the hills we see beyond it, and which are no doubt the opposite cliffs of the basin. There are numerous wells both here and at Kâf, wide and shallow, for the water is only eight feet below the surface of the ground. From these the palm gardens are irrigated. There are wells too outside, all lying low and at the same level. The water is drinkable, by no means excellent. We crossed a large salt lake, now dry, where the salt is gathered for the caravans.

On our road Mohammed entertained us with tales of his birth and ancestry. The people of Kâf have heard of the Ibn Arûks, and have told Mohammed that he will find relations in many parts of Arabia besides Jôf. They say there is somebody at Bereydeh, and a certain Ibn Homeydi, whom Mohammed has heard of as a cousin. Then here at Itheri, the Sheykh's wife is a member of the Jôf family. Everything in fact seems going just as we expected it.

Itheri is a still smaller place than Kâf, but it boasts of an ancient building and miniature castle inside the walls, something after the fashion of the Hauran houses. This, instead of mud, the common

Arab material, is built of black stones, well squared and regularly placed. On the lintel of the doorway there is or rather has been, an inscription in some ancient character, perhaps Himyaritic, which we would have copied had it been legible, but the weather has almost effaced it.* Here we are being entertained by Jeruan, an untidy half-witted young man, with long hair in plaits and a face like a Scotch terrier, who is the son of Merzuga, Mohammed's cousin, and consequently a cousin himself. Though nothing much to be proud of as a relation, we find him an attentive host. His mother is an intelligent and well-bred woman, and it seems strange that she should have so inferior a son. Her other three sons, for Jeruan is the eldest of four, have their wits like other people, but they are kept in the background. Merzuga came to see me just now with a large dish of dates in her hand, and stopped to talk. Her face is still attractive, and she must have once been extremely beautiful. I notice that she wears a number of silver rings on her fingers like wedding rings.

Merzuga tells us we shall find plenty of Ibn Arûk relations at Jôf. She herself left it young and talks of it as an earthly paradise from which she has been torn to live in this wretched little oasis. Itheri is indeed a forlorn place, all except Jeruan's palm garden. After a walk in the palm garden, in which

* We were told that this inscription related to hidden treasure, a common fancy among the Arabs who cannot read.

my lameness prevented me from joining, we all sat down to a very good dinner of lamb and sopped bread—the bread tasted like excellent pastry—served us by Jeruan in person, standing according to Arab fashion when guests are eating. His mother looks well after him, and tells him what to do, and it is evident, though he has the sense to say very little, that he is looked upon as not quite "accountable" in his family. Wilfrid describes the walk in the garden as rather amusing, Mohammed and Abdallah making long speeches of compliments about all they saw, and telling Jeruan's head man extraordinary stories of the grandeur and wealth of Tudmur. Jeruan's garden, the only one at Itheri, contains four hundred palm trees, many of them newly planted, and none more than twenty-five years old. Amongst them was a young tree of the *héllua* variety, the sweet date of Jôf, imported from thence, and considered here a great rarity. At this there was a chorus of admiration. The ithel trees were also much admired. They are grown for timber, and spring from the stub when cut down, a six years' growth being already twenty feet high.

Two men have arrived from Jôf with the welcome news that all is well between this and Jôf; that is, there are no Arabs yet in the Wady Sirhán; welcome because we have no introductions, and a meeting might be disagreeable. The season is so late and the pasture so bad, that the Wady has

been quite deserted since last spring. There will be no road now, or track of any kind, and as it is at least two hundred miles to Jôf, we must have a guide to shew us the wells. Such a one we have found in a funny looking little Bedouin, a Sherári, who happens to be here and who will go with us for ten mejidies.

December 29.—There was a bitter east wind blowing when we started this morning, and I observed a peewit, like a land bird at sea, flying hither and thither under the lea of the palm trees, looking hopeless and worn out with its long voyage. Poor thing, it will die here, for there is nothing such a bird can eat anywhere for hundreds of miles. It must have been blown out of its reckoning, perhaps from the Euphrates.

Our course to-day lay along the edge of the Wady, sometimes crossing stony promontories from the upper plain, sometimes sandy inlets from the Wady. The heights of these were always pretty much the same, 2250 feet above and 1850 below—so these may be taken as the respective heights of the Hamád and of the Wady Sirhán. There are besides, here and there, isolated tells, three hundred to four hundred feet higher than either. Rough broken ground all day, principally of sand with slaty grit sprinkled over it, the vegetation very scanty on the high ground, but richer in the hollows. In one small winding ravine leading into the Wady, we found ghada trees, but otherwise nothing bigger than

shrubs. There Awwad told us that two years ago he was robbed and stripped by a ghazú from the Hauran. He had lost six camels and all he possessed. The Haurani were eight in number, his own party six. I asked him how it was the robbers got the best of it. He said it was "min Allah" (from God). The Wady Sirhán seems to be a favourite place for robbers, and Awwad takes the occurrence as a matter of course. I asked him why he had left his tribe, the Shammar, and come to live so far north as Salkhad. He said it was "*nasíb*," a thing fated; that he had married a Salkhad wife, and she would not go away from her people. I asked him how he earned his living, and he laughed. "I have got half a mare," he said, "and a delúl, and I make ghazús. There are nine of us Shammar in the Hauran, and we go out together towards Zerka, or to the western Leja and take cattle by night." He then showed us some frightful scars of wounds, which he had got on these occasions, and made Wilfrid feel a bullet which was still sticking in his side. He is a curious creature, but we like him, and, robber or no robber, he has quite the air of a gentleman. He is besides an agreeable companion, sings very well, recites ballads, and is a great favourite everywhere. At Kâf and Itheri he was hugged and kissed by the men, old and young, and welcomed by the women in every house.

We were nearly frozen all the morning, the wind

piercing through our fur cloaks. At half-past twelve, after four hours' marching, we came to some wells called Kurághir, six of them in a bare hollow, with camel tracks leading from every point of the compass towards them. It is clear that at some time of the year the Wady is inhabited; Awwad says by the Roala in winter, but this year there is nobody. The water, like that of Kâf and Itheri, is slightly brackish. Near Kurághir we saw some gazelles and coursed them vainly. It is vexatious, for I have forgotten to bring meat, and unless we can catch or shoot something, we shall have none till we get to Jôf. I ought to have thought of it, for, though provisions are by no means plentiful at Itheri, we could probably have bought a sheep and driven it on with us. The pain of my lameness distracted my attention—a bad excuse, but the only one. I suffer less when riding than at any other time.

We are now, since four o'clock, camped on the sand under some ghada bushes, and the wind has dropped for the moment. It seems always to blow here except for an hour about sunset and another at dawn. We are to dine on beef tea, burghul with curry sauce, and a water-melon, the last of our Hauran store.

December 30.—On the high level all the morning over ground like the Harra with volcanic stones, a fierce south-east wind in our faces, so that we could not talk or hardly think. Our course lay

towards an inhospitable looking range of hills called El Mizmeh, and when we reached these, to the right of them, for we travel in anything but a straight line. Saw great numbers of red locusts which, as the sun warmed the ground, began to fly about and were pursued by the men and knocked down with sticks. Enough have been secured to make a dish for dinner. When flying, these insects look very like large May flies, as they have the same helpless heavy flight, drifting down the wind with hardly sufficient power of direction to keep them clear of obstacles. Sometimes they fly right against the camels, and at others drop heavily into the bushes where they are easily caught. When sitting on the ground, however, they are hard to see, and they keep a good look-out and jump up and drift away again as you come near them. They seem to have more sense, than power of moving.

At two we came to more wells,—Mahiyeh—most of them choked up with sand, but one containing a sufficient supply of brackish water. These wells lay among clumps of tamarisk, out of which we started several hares which the greyhounds could not catch, as they always dodged back to cover. Wilfrid and I waited behind for this fruitless hunting upon which our dinner depended, and did not join the rest of the party for more than a mile. Before we reached them we came upon Hanna, sitting on the ground on his *hedûm* (quilt and abba), and Ibrahim standing over him, both shouting, "*Wah! wah! wah!*"

We could not conceive what had happened and could get no information from either of them, except that they were going to remain where they were. These two townspeople sitting on their beds all alone in the Wady Sirhán were so absurd a spectacle that, at the moment, we could not help laughing; but it was not an affair for laughter, and of course it was impossible to leave them there. We insisted on an explanation. There had been a quarrel between Hanna and Abdallah, because the latter had driven on Hanna's delúl fast with the other camels, and refused to let it be made to kneel down and get up again. Abdallah and Awwab were in a great hurry to get as far from Mahiyeh as possible, because Hamdán the Sherâri says it is a dangerous spot. But Hanna was angry, and in his anger he dropped his cloak; upon which he jumped down, pulling his bed after him, and sat down on the ground. There the others left him, wailing and raving, and in this state we found him. He proposed that he and Ibrahim should be left behind to be caten up by the hyæna whose tracks we had seen. However, Ibrahim, who had only stayed to keep him company, was quite ready to go on, and, seeing this, Hanna was not long in getting up, and, making his brother carry his bedding, he followed us. It was no good inquiring who was right or who was wrong; we stopped the camels, and, driving back the delúl, insisted on Hanna's mounting, which after some faces he did, and the episode

ended. Mohammed has been commissioned to insist with the Arabs on peace, and we have we think prevailed with Hanna to bear no malice. It is absolutely impossible for anybody to go back now without losing his life, and I trust they will all be reasonable; it is disagreeable to think that there has been discord in our small party, separated as it is from all the rest of the world. We are camped now in a side wady where the camel pasture is good. We saw the place from a great distance, for we are becoming skilful now at guessing likely spots. Wherever you see rocky ground in lines you may be sure pasture will be found. We have seen no sign of recent habitation in the country since leaving Itheri, neither footprint of camel nor of man.

The locusts fried are fairly good to eat.

December 31.—Another long day's march, and here we are at the end of the year in one of the most desolate places in the world. It was so cold last night, that all the locusts are dead. They are lying about everywhere, and being eaten up by the little desert birds, larks, and wheatears. We have got down again into the main bed of the Wady Sirhán, which is still at the same level as before; it is here nearly flat, and covered with great bunches of guttub and other shrubs, all very salt to the taste; the soil crumbly and unsound, in places white with saltpetre. Awwad and the Sherári declare that there are quicksands, *hadôda* (literally,

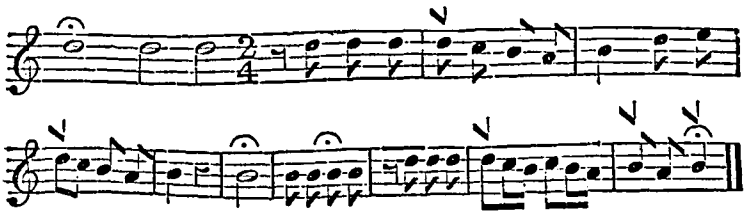
an abyss), somewhere in the neighbourhood, in which everything that passes over sinks and disappears, leaving no trace—men, camels, and gazelles; but of such we saw nothing. Coasting the edge of the Wady, we came suddenly on some gazelles, which led us to higher ground, where we found a stony wilderness of the Harra type; and amongst the stones we saw a hyæna trotting leisurely. We got nothing, however; neither him nor the gazelles, and are still without meat. No other incident occurred till we came to a palm tree standing by itself in an open place; near it, a charming little spring, quite in among the roots of a thick clump of palm bushes. The hole is about three feet across, and two deep, with about a foot of water in it; the water rises again as fast as it is taken out, but never overflows. There were traces of hyænas and gazelles about, and this, I suppose, is where the desert animals come to drink, for it is the only water above ground we have yet seen. This spring is called Maasreh (little by little)—a pleasant spot where we should have liked to camp; but it is always dangerous to stop near water, lest people should come. Awwad says there is some tradition of a town or village having formerly existed here; but no ruins are to be seen. The water is sweet and good, as might be perceived by the insects which were swimming about in it. The Arabs always judge of the wholesomeness of water in this way. There is nothing more suspicious in the

desert than perfectly clear water, free from animal life.

We are now camped under a low cliff, hollowed out into caves as if by water, capital dens for hyænas. There is a beautiful view looking back at the Mizmeh hills. The evening is still and cold, but we do not like to make much fire for fear of enemies. Hamdán, our Sherári guide, an uncouth, savage creature to look at, has been reciting a very pretty ballad, which he tells us he made himself. It is in stanzas of four lines with alternate rhymes, and relates to an episode in his own family. As he recited it the rest of the Arabs chimed in, repeating always the last word of the line with the rhyming syllable; it had a good effect. The story was simple, and told how Hamdán's mother and sister had a quarrel, and how they brought their grievances before Obeyd ibn Rashid at Haïl, and how the old Sheykh settled it by putting a rope round the daughter's neck, and bidding the mother hold the end of it, and do so for the rest of their days. Whereupon the daughter had kissed her mother, and Obeyd had sent them away with presents, a delúl, a cloak each, and a hundred measures of wheat, a present he had continued giving them every year till he died, and which is given still by his nephew, Mohammed, the present ruler of Jebel Shammar. Hamdán has also given us an interesting account of the Haïl politics, which agrees very closely with what we remember of Mr. Palgrave's, carrying them on to

a later date. The present Ibn Rashid is not by any means so amiable a character as his brother Tellál; and Hamdán's account of his career is rather startling. It appears that he has put to death something like a dozen of his relations, and is more feared than loved by the Shammar. This is very tiresome, as it may be a reason for our not going on to Nejd after all. But we shall hear more when we get to Jôf.

Hamdán's recitative was, as nearly as I could write the musical part of it, like this :—



January 1, 1879.—A black frost, but still. We have changed our course, and have been going all day nearly due south—twenty-five miles, as near as we can calculate it—and down the middle of the Wady Sirhán, a level plain of sand and grit, with here and there mounds of pure white sand covered with ghada. Our plan is to get up and strike the tents at the first glimpse of dawn, drink a cup of coffee, and eat a biscuit or a bit of rusk (kâk), and then march on till three or four in the afternoon without stopping for an instant, eating half-a-dozen dates and some more rusk as we go. Then immediately on stopping, and before the tents are pitched, we light a fire and make coffee, which carries us on

till dinner is ready, about sunset. It is wonderful how little food one can do with while travelling. We have had no meat now for the last four days till to-day, only beef tea, and burghul, and dates, with sometimes fried onions, or flour mixed with curry powder and butter, and baked into a cake. This last is very good, and easily made. To-day, however, we are in clover, as the dogs coursed a hare, and we dug her out. The desert hare is very little bigger than a large rabbit, and is literally too much for one, and not enough for two ; but Mohammed magnanimously foregoes his portion, and says he can wait.

Mohammed has been improving the occasion of a dispute which arose this evening on a choice of camp, to tell us some stories of his own adventures in the desert ; and we have been telling him ours. He had a younger brother, whom his mother was very fond of, a regular town boy with "a white face like a girl," who knew how to read and write and knew nothing of the desert (Mohammed himself, like his great namesake, has always been a camel driver). Now at Tudmur they have constantly had fights and quarrels for the Sheykhat, and on one such occasion his brother was sent away by his parents to Sokhne, the neighbouring village, about thirty miles from Tudmur ; and there he stayed for some time with a relation. At last, however, he got tired of being away from home, and wanted to see his mother. He started off with another boy of his own age (about fifteen) to walk back to Tudmur.

It was in the middle of summer, and they lost their way and wandered far down into the Hamád where they died of thirst. Mohammed had gone out to look for them, and found them both dead close together.

On another occasion Mohammed himself was nearly meeting his death. He had gone alone with his camels on the road to Karieteyn, and had fallen in with a ghazú of robbers from the hills. These stripped him of everything except his shirt and a tarbush. His gun he had contrived to hide under a bush, but they left him nothing else, neither food nor water, and it was in the middle of summer. Karieteyn, the nearest place, was about forty miles off, and he was lame with a blow he had received. However, when the robbers were gone, he set out in that direction, and managed to walk on till night and the next day, till he got to a ruin called Kasr el Hayr where he fell down senseless under the shade, and lay for twenty-four hours unable to move, and suffering agonies from thirst. At last, when he had said to himself, "now I shall have to die," a party of camel men from Sokhne came by and found him lying there. At first they took him for a slave, for the sun had burnt him black, and his tongue was dried so that he could not speak. Fortunately one of the party recognised him, and then they gave him water. He still could give no account of himself, but they put him on a donkey and brought him with them to Tudmur.

Our own story was the one of our quarrel with Abunjad and our rush from Akaba to Gaza, when we so nearly perished of thirst.

The year would have begun prosperously, but for a severe cold Wilfrid has caught. He has lost his voice.

January 2.—A hard frost—water frozen in the pail. Reached the wells of Shaybeh at half-past eight and watered the camels—water very brackish—level by aneroid 1950, depth to surface of water twelve feet. Got into a sort of track, part of the morning, but one evidently not frequented. At one o'clock came to another well, near a curious rock which at first we took for a castle. We have now crossed the wady and are on its western bank. Passed a ruined house of no great antiquity called Abu Kasr and another well near it, and at half-past four have encamped under some sand hills, crowned with ghada, a delightful spot not far from a fourth well called Bir el-Jerawi—level by barometer 1840. Wilfrid has recovered his voice but still has a bad cold. I am as lame as ever, though in less pain. I sometimes think I shall never be able to walk again.

Friday, January 3.—We have had an adventure at last and a disagreeable one; a severe lesson as to the danger of encamping near wells. We started early, but were delayed a whole hour at Jerawi taking water, and did not leave the wells till nearly eight o'clock. Then we turned back nearly due east across the wady. The soil of pure white

sand was heavy going, and we went slowly, crossing low undulations without other landmark than the tells we had left behind us. Here and there rose little mounds tufted with ghada. To one of these Wilfrid and I cantered on, leaving the camels behind us, and dismounting, tied our mares to the bushes that we might enjoy a few minutes' rest, and eat our midday mouthful—the greyhounds meanwhile played about and chased each other in the sand. We had finished, and were talking of I know not what, when the camels passed us. They were hardly a couple of hundred yards in front when suddenly we heard a thud, thud, thud on the sand, a sound of galloping. Wilfrid jumped to his feet, looked round and called out, "Get on your mare. This is a ghazú." As I scrambled round the bush to my mare I saw a troop of horsemen charging down at full gallop with their lances, not two hundred yards off. Wilfrid was up as he spoke, and so should I have been, but for my sprained knee and the deep sand, both of which gave way as I was rising. I fell back. There was no time to think and I had hardly struggled to my feet, when the enemy was upon us, and I was knocked down by a spear. Then they all turned on Wilfrid, who had waited for me, some of them jumping down on foot to get hold of his mare's halter. He had my gun with him, which I had just before handed to him, but unloaded; his own gun and his sword being on his delúl. He fortunately had on very thick clothes, two abbas one over the other, and

English clothes underneath, so the lances did him no harm. At last his assailants managed to get his gun from him and broke it over his head, hitting him three times and smashing the stock. Resistance seemed to me useless, and I shouted to the nearest horseman, "*ana dahîlak*" (I am under your protection), the usual form of surrender. Wilfrid hearing this, and thinking he had had enough of this unequal contest, one against twelve, threw himself off his mare. The *khayal* (horsemen) having seized both the mares, paused, and as soon as they had gathered breath, began to ask us who we were and where we came from. "English, and we have come from Damascus," we replied, "and our camels are close by. Come with us, and you shall hear about it." Our caravan, while all this had happened, and it only lasted about five minutes, had formed itself into a square and the camels were kneeling down, as we could plainly see from where we were. I hardly expected the horsemen to do as we asked, but the man who seemed to be their leader at once let us walk on (a process causing me acute pain), and followed with the others to the caravan. We found Mohammed and the rest of our party entrenched behind the camels with their guns pointed, and as we approached, Mohammed stepped out and came forward. "Min entum?" (who are you?) was the first question. "Roala min Ibn Debaa." "Wallah? will you swear by God?" "Wallah! we swear."

GHAZÚ IN THE WADY SIRHÁN. [*Vol. I., p.* 104.

"And you?" "Mohammed ibn Arûk of Tudmur." "Wallah?" "Wallah!" "And these are Franjis travelling with you?" "Wallah! Franjis, friends of Ibn Shaalan."

It was all right, we had fallen into the hands of friends. Ibn Shaalan, our host of last year, was bound to protect us, even so far away in the desert, and none of his people dared meddle with us, knowing this. Besides, Mohammed was a Tudmuri, and as such could not be molested by Roala, for Tudmur pays tribute to Ibn Shaalan, and the Tudmuris have a right to his protection. So, as soon as the circumstances were made clear, orders were given by the chief of the party to his followers to bring back our mares, and the gun, and everything which had been dropped in the scuffle. Even to Wilfrid's tobacco bag, all was restored. The young fellows who had taken the mares made rather wry faces, bitterly lamenting their bad fortune in finding us friends. "Ah the beautiful mares," they said, "and the beautiful gun." But Arabs are always good-humoured, whatever else their faults, and presently we were all on very good terms, sitting in a circle on the sand, eating dates and passing round the pipe of peace. They were now our guests.

What struck us as strange in all this was, the ready good faith with which they believed every word we said. We had spoken the truth, but why did they trust us? They knew neither us nor Mohammed; yet they had taken our word that we were

friends, when they might so easily have ridden off without question with our property. Nobody would ever have heard of it, or known who they were.

It appears that Ibn Debaa (hyæna), the Sheykh, and his friends were a small party in advance of the main body of the Roala. They had come on to see what pasturage there might be in the wady, and had there camped only a few miles from the wells of El Jerawi near which we slept last night. They had come in the morning for water, and had seen our tracks in the sand, and so had followed, riding in hot haste to overtake us. It was a mere accident their finding us separated from the rest of the caravan, and they had charged down as soon as they saw us. Everything depends on rapidity in these attacks, and this had been quite successful. The least hesitation on their part, and we should have been safe with our camels. There they could not have molested us, for though they were twelve to our eight, they had only lances, while we carried firearms. We liked the look of these young Roala. In spite of their rough behaviour, we could see that they were gentlemen. They were very much ashamed of having used their spears against me, and made profuse apologies; they only saw a person wearing a cloak, and never suspected but that it belonged to a man. Indeed their mistake is not a matter for surprise, for they were so out of breath and excited with their gallop, that they looked at nothing except the object of their desire—the mares. The loss of

these, however, I fear, was to them a cause of greater sorrow than the rough handling to which we had been treated, when, after explanations given and regrets interchanged, they rode away. Mohammed was anxious not to detain them, prudently considering that our acquaintance with them had gone far enough, and it was plain that Awwad was in a terrible fidget. I fancy he has a good many debts of blood owing him, and is somewhat shy of strangers. The others, too, were rather subdued and silent; so we wished Ibn Debaa farewell and let him go.

The mares belonging to this ghazú were small, compact, and active, with especially good shoulders and fine heads, but they were of a more poneyish type than our own Anazeh mares. Most of them were bay. One I saw was ridden in a bit.

When the Rcala were gone we compared notes. In the first place, Wilfrid's hurts were examined, but they are only contusions. The thick rope he wears round his head had received all the blows, and though the stock of the gun is clean broken, steel and all, his head is still sound. The lances could not get through his clothes. As regards myself the only injury I have received is the renewal of my sprain. But I could almost forget the pain of it in my anger at it, as being the cause of our being caught. But for this we might have galloped away to our camels and received the enemy in quite another fashion. I was asked if I was not frightened, but in fact there was at first no time, and afterwards rage swallowed

up every other feeling. Wilfrid says, but I do not believe him, that he felt frightened, and was very near running away and leaving me, but on reflection stayed. The affair seems more alarming now it is over, which is perhaps natural.

As to the others, Mohammed is terribly crestfallen at the not very heroic part he took in the action. The purely defensive attitude of the caravan was no doubt prudent; but it seemed hardly up to the ideal of chivalry Mohammed has always professed. He keeps on reproaching himself, but we tell him that he did quite right. It was certainly our own fault that we were surprised in this way, and if the enemy, as they might have been, had really been robbers and outlaws, our safety depended on our having the caravan intact as a fortress to return to after being robbed. To have rushed forward in disorder to help us would have exposed the whole caravan to a defeat, which in so desolate a region as this would mean nothing less than dying of cold and starvation.

We may indeed be very thankful that matters were no worse. I shall never again dismount while I remain crippled, and never as long as I live, will I tie my horse to a bush.

Many vows of sheep, it appears, were made by all the party of spectators during the action, so we are to have a feast at Jôf—if ever we get there.

Now all is quiet, and Hamdán the Sherâri is singing the loves of a young man and maiden who

were separated from one another by mischief-makers, and afterwards managed to carry on a correspondence by tying their letters to their goats when these went out to pasture

January 4.—There was no dawdling this morning, for everybody has become serious, and we were off by seven, and have marched steadily on for quite thirty miles without stopping, at the rate of three-and-a-half miles an hour. We have left the Wady Sirhán for good, and are making a straight cut across the Hamád for Jôf. There is no water this way, but less chance of ghazús. The soil has been a light hard gravel, with hardly a plant or an inequality to interfere with the camels' pace. At one o'clock we came to some hills of sandstone faced with iron, the beginning of the broken ground in which, they say, Jôf stands. We had been gradually ascending all day, and as we reached that, the highest point of our route, the barometer marked 2660 feet. Here we found a number of little pits, used, so Hamdán explained, for collecting and winnowing *semh*, a little red grain which grows wild in this part of the desert, and is used by the Jôf people for food.

A little later we sighted two men on a delúl, the first people we have seen, except the ghazú, since leaving Kâf. Wilfrid and Mohammed galloped up to see what they were, and Mohammed, to atone I suppose for his inertness on a recent occasion, fired several shots, and succeeded in frightening them

out of their wits. They were quite poor people, dressed only in old shirts, and they had a skin of dates on one side the camel and a skin of water on the other. They were out, they said, to look for a man who had been lost in the Wady Sirhán, one of the men sent by Ibn Rashid to Kâf for the tribute. He had been taken ill, and had stopped behind his companions, and nobody had seen him since. They had been sent out by the governor of Jôf to look for him. They said that we were only a few hours from the town.

Meanwhile, I had remained with our camels, listening to the remarks of Awwad and Hamdán, both dying with curiosity about the two zellems from Jôf. At last Awwad could wait no longer, and begged Hamdán to go with him. They both jumped down from the camels they were riding, and set off as hard as they could run to meet the Jôfi, who by this time had proceeded on their way, while Wilfrid and Mohammed were returning. Wilfrid on arriving held out to me a handful of the best dates I have ever eaten, which the men had given him. The Sherâri and Awwad presently came back with no dates, but a great deal of Jôf gossip.

We are encamped this evening near some curious tells of red, yellow, and purple sandstone, a formation exactly similar to parts of the Sinai peninsula. There is a splendid view to the south, and we can see far away a blue line of hills* which,

* Jebel el Tawîl.

they tell us, are beyond Jôf, at the edge of the Nefúd!

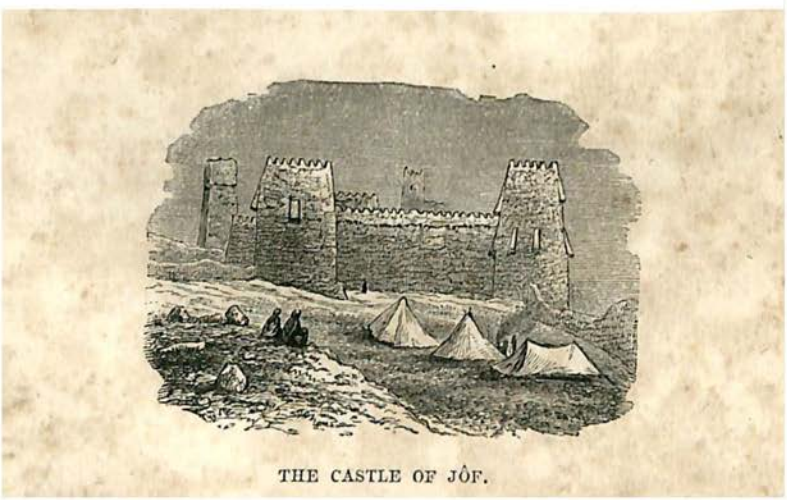
We have been questioning Hamdán about his tribe, the Sherarât, and he gives the following as their principal sections:—

El Hueymreh. . . .	Sheykh	El Hawi.
El Helesseh . . .	„	Ibn Hedayaja.
El Khayâli	„	Zeyd el Werdi.
Shemalat	„	Fathal el Dendeh.

The Sherarât have no horses, but breed the finest dromedaries in Arabia. Their best breed is called *Benat Udeyhan*, (daughters of Udeyhan). With a Bint Udeyhan, he says, that if you started from where we now are at sunset, you would be to-morrow at sunrise at Kâf, a distance of a hundred and eighty miles. A thief not long ago stole a Sherâri delúl at Mezárib, and rode it all the way to Haïl in seven days and nights!

January 5.—A long wearisome ride of twenty-two miles, always expecting to see Jôf, and always disappointed. The ground broken up into fantastic hills and ridges, but on a lower level than yesterday, descending in fact all day. Every now and then we caught sight of the Wady Sirhán far away to the right, with blue hills beyond it, but in front of us there seemed an endless succession of rocky ridges. At last from the top of one of these there became visible a black outline, standing darkly out against the yellow confusion of sandstone hills and barren wadys, which we knew must be the castle of Marid.

It looked a really imposing fortress, though dreary enough in the middle of this desolation. Towards this we pushed on, eager for a nearer view. Then we came to a natural causeway of white rock, which Awwad and Hamdán both affirmed to be a continuation of the Roman road from Salkhad. We should have liked to believe this, but it was too clear that the road was one made by nature. Along this we travelled for some miles till it disappeared. All of a sudden we came as it were to the edge of a basin, and there, close under us, lay a large oasis of palms, surrounded by a wall with towers at intervals, and a little town clustering round the black castle. We were at Jôf.



THE CASTLE OF JÔF.

CHAPTER VI.

And Laban said to him, "Surely thou art my bone and my flesh." And he abode with him the space of a month.—Book of Genesis.

The Jôf oasis—We are entertained by Ibn Rashid's lieutenant—A haunch of wild cow—Dancing in the castle—Prayers—We go on to Meskakeh.

Jof is not at all what we expected. We thought we should find it a large cultivated district, and it turns out to be merely a small town. There is nothing at all outside the walls except a few square patches, half an acre or so each, green with young corn. These are watered from wells, and irrigated just like the gardens inside the walls, with little water-courses carefully traced in patterns, like a jam tart. The whole basin of Jôf is indeed barely three miles across at its widest, and looks, what it no doubt is, the empty basin of a little inland sea. How, or when, or why, it was originally dried up, is beyond me to guess (one can only say with Mohammed, it is "min Allah"); but the proofs of its pelagic origin are apparent everywhere. It looks lower than the rest of the Wady Sirhán, with which it probably communicates; and we thought at first that it might have been the last

water-hole, as it were, of the sea when it dried up. But this is not really the case, as its lowest part is exactly on a level with all the hollows of the wady. Its wells are between 1800 and 1900 feet above the sea. They are shallow, only a few feet from the surface, and the water is drawn by camels pulling a long rope with a bucket, which empties itself as it reaches the surface into a kind of trough. The town, with its gardens, all encircled by a mud wall ten feet high, is about two miles long from north to south, and half a mile across. The rest of the plain is nearly a dead flat of sand, with here and there a patch of hard ground, sandy clay, where the water collects when it rains, and salt is left when it dries up.

Wherever a well has been sunk, a little garden has been made, fenced in with a wall, and planted with palms. There are perhaps a dozen of these outlying farms occupying two or three acres each. In one place there are four or five houses with their gardens together, which have the look of a village. The whole of the basin, except these oases, is dazzlingly white, showing the palm groves as black patches on its surface. Jôf itself contains not more than six hundred houses, square boxes of mud, clustering, most of them, round the ruin of Marid, but not all, for there are half a dozen separate clusters in different parts of the grove. Many of these houses have a kind of tower, or upper storey, and there are small towers at irregular intervals all round the

outer wall. The chief feature of the town, besides Marid, is a new castle just outside the *enceinte*, inhabited by Ibn Rashid's lieutenant. It stands on rising ground, and is an imposing building, square, with battlemented walls forty feet high, flanked with round and square towers tapering upwards twenty feet higher than the rest. It has no windows, only holes to shoot from; and each tower has several excrescences like hoods (machicoulis) for the same purpose.

There is nothing like a bazaar in Jôf, nor even streets, as one generally understands the word, only a number of narrow tortuous lanes, with mud walls on either side. As we rode into the town, we found the lanes crowded with armed men, all carrying swords in the way we had seen at Kâf, dark-visaged and, we thought, not very pleased to see us. They answered our "salaam aleykum" simply, without moving, and let us pass on without any particular demonstration of hospitality. To suppose them indifferent, however, was a mistake; their apparent coldness was only Arab formality, and when Mohammed began to inquire after the house of his relations, they very civilly pointed out the way, and one or two of them came with us. We were led down a number of narrow byways, and through the palm-gardens to the other side of the town, and then out by another gate beyond to one of the isolated farms we had seen from the cliff. It was close by, not a quarter of a mile, and in a few minutes more we

had dismounted, and were being hospitably entertained in the tidy kahwah of Huseyn's house.

What Huseyn's exact relationship is to Mohammed, I have not yet been able to discover—Mohammed himself hardly knows—but here it is evident that any consanguinity, however slight, is considered of high importance. We were no sooner seated by Huseyn's fire, watching the coffee roasting, than another relation arrived, attracted by the news of our arrival, and then another, both loud in their expostulations at our having accepted Huseyn's hospitality, not theirs. Mohammed was kissed and hugged, and it was all he could do to pacify these injured relatives by promising to stay a week with each, as soon as our visit to Huseyn should be over. Blood here is indeed thicker than water. The sudden appearance of a twentieth cousin is enough to set everybody by the ears.

A lamb has been killed, and we have each had the luxury of a bath in our own tent, and a thorough change of raiment. The tent is pitched in a little palm garden behind the house, and we are quite at peace, and able to think over all that has happened, and make our plans for the future.

January 6.—Last night, while we were sitting drinking coffee for the ninth or tenth time since our arrival, two young men came into the kahwah and sat down. They were very gaily dressed in silk jibbehs, and embroidered shirts under their drab woollen abbas. They wore red cotton kefiyehs on

their heads, bound with white rope, and their swords were silver-hilted. Everyone in the kahwah stood up as they entered, and we both thought them to be the sons of the Sheykh, or some great personage at Jôf. Wilfrid whispered a question about them to Huseyn, who laughed and said they were not sons of sheykhs, but "zellemet Ibn Rashid," Ibn Rashid's men, in fact, his soldiers. The red kefiyeh, and the silver hilted sword, was a kind of uniform. They had come, as it presently appeared, from Dowass, the acting governor of Jôf, to invite us to the castle, and though we were sorry to leave Huseyn's quiet garden and his kind hospitality, we have thought it prudent to comply. Neither Huseyn nor anyone else seemed to think it possible we could refuse, for Ibn Rashid's government is absolute at Jôf, and his lieutenant's wishes are treated as commands, not that there seems to be ill-feeling between the garrison and the town; the soldiers we saw appear to be on good terms with everybody, and are indeed so good-humoured, that it would be difficult to quarrel with them. But Jôf is a conquered place, held permanently in a state of siege, and the discipline maintained is very strict. We have moved accordingly with all our camp to the precincts of the official residence, and are encamped just under its walls. The *kasr*, which, as I have said, is outside the town, was built about twelve years ago by Metaab ibn Rashid, brother of the Emir Tellál (Mr. Palgrave's friend), and though so modern a

construction, has a perfectly mediæval look, for architecture never changes in Arabia. It is a very picturesque building with its four high towers at the corners, pierced with loopholes, but without windows. There is one only door, and that a small one in an angle of the wall, and it is always kept locked. Inside it the entrance turns and twists about, and then there is a small court-yard surrounded by the high walls, and a kahwah, besides a few other small rooms, all dark and gloomy like dungeons. Here the deputy governor lives with six soldiers, young men from Haïl, who, between them, govern and garrison and do the police work of Jôf. The governor himself is away just now at Meskakeh, the other small town included in the Jôf district, about twenty miles from here. He is a negro slave, we are told, but a person of great consequence, and a personal friend of the Emir.

Jôf, as far as we have been able to learn through Mohammed, for we don't like to ask too many questions ourselves, was formally an appanage of the Ibn Shaalans, Sheykhs of the Roala, and it still pays tribute to Sotamm; but about twenty years ago Metaab ibn Rashid conquered it, and it has ever since been treated as part of Nejd. There have been one or two insurrections, but they have been vigorously put down, and the Jôfi are now afraid of stirring a finger against the Emir. On the occasion of one of these revolts, Metaab cut down a great

many palm trees, and half ruined the town, so they are obliged to wait and make the best of it. In truth, the government can hardly be very oppressive. These six soldiers with the best will in the world cannot do much bullying in a town of four or five thousand inhabitants. They are all strong, active, good-humoured young fellows, serving here for a year at a time, and then being relieved. They are volunteers, and do not get pay, but have, I suppose, some advantages when they have done their service. They seem quite devoted to the Emir.

Four years ago, they tell us, the Turkish Governor of Damascus sent a military expedition against Jôf (the same we heard of at Kâf), and held it for a a few months; but Ibn Rashid complained to the Sultan of this, and threatened to turn them out and to discontinue the tribute he pays to the Sherîf of Medina if the troops were not withdrawn, so they had to go back. This tribute is paid by the Emir on account of his outlying possessions, such as Kâf, Teyma, and Jôf, which the Turks have on various occasions attempted to meddle with. He is, however, quite independent of the Sultan, and acknowledges no suzerain anywhere. The greatness of Ibn Saoud and the Wahhabis is now a thing of the past, and Mohammed ibn Rashid is the most powerful ruler in Arabia. We hear a charming account of Nejd, at least of the northern part of it. You may travel anywhere, they say, from Jôf to Kasîm without escort. The roads are safe everywhere. A robbery

has not been known on the Emir's highway for many years, and people found loafing about near the roads have their heads cut off. Ibn Rashid allows no ghazús against travellers, and when he makes war it is with his enemies. The Ibn Haddal and Ibn Majil are his friends, but he is on bad terms with Sotamm and the Sebaa Sheykhs.

There are two twelve pounder cannons of English make in the castle. They are ancient pieces of no value, but were used, it appears, in the siege of Jôf by Metaab.

The Jôfi are of a different race from the Shammar of Nejd, being as mixed in their origin almost as the Tudmuri or the villagers of the Euphrates. Huseyn el-Kelb, our first host here, tells us he belongs to the Taï, and that others of his neighbours are Sirhán or Beni Laam. He is not really a cousin of Mohammed's, but a cousin's cousin; the real cousins living at Meskakeh. Though we were very comfortable with him, we are not less well off here; and it is more interesting being at the kasr. Dowass, the deputy governor, is a very amiable man, and all his soldiers are exceedingly civil and obliging. They are a cheerful set of people, talking openly about everything with us, politics and all. They assure us Ibn Rashid will be delighted to see us, but we must see Jóhar, the black governor, first. There are several real slaves in the fort, but no women. The soldiers leave their wives behind at Haïl when they go away on service. There are no horses

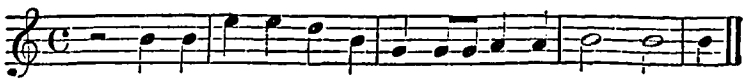
THE OASIS OF JÔF.

[*Vol. I., p.* 120.

in Jôf, except one two-year-old colt belonging to Dubejeh, one of the soldiers, who all admire our *shagra* (chestnut mare) amazingly, saying that there is nothing in Nejd so beautiful. Neither are there any beasts of burden, not even asses. The few camels there are in the town are kept for drawing water; and the only other four-footed creatures I have seen are a few goats and three half-starved cows at the kasr. There is not an atom of vegetation within miles of Jôf, and the camels and these cows have to eat chopped straw and refuse dates.

Our dinner to-day consisted of a lamb and three other dishes—one a sort of paste like the paste used for pasting paper, another merely rancid butter with chopped onions, and the third, bread sopped in water—all nasty except the lamb. There was, however, afterwards an extra course brought to us as a surprise, a fillet of "wild cow" (probably an antelope) from the Nefûd, baked in the ashes, one of the best meats I ever tasted.

In the evening we had an entertainment of dancing and singing, in which Dowass, as well as the soldiers, took part. They performed a kind of sword dance, one performer beating on a drum made of palm wood and horse hide, while the rest held their swords over their shoulders and chaunted in solemn measure, dancing as solemnly. Occasionally the swords were brandished, and then there was a scream very like what may be heard in the hunting-field at home. Once or twice there was a distinct

who-whoop, exactly in the proper key, and with the proper emphasis. The tunes were many of them striking, after the manner of Arabian music. One of them ran thus :—

The dancing ended, a huge bowl of date molasses (dibs) and juice from *trengs* (a gigantic sort of lemon) was mixed; and surprising quantities of this temperance liquid drunk. Now we are quiet, outside the castle, which is locked up for the night, and are at liberty to write or make sketches by moonlight, things we dare not do in the daytime.

January 7.—Hamdán, our Sherâri guide, who had disappeared, returned this morning furtively for the balance of pay due to him. He says he is afraid of the people at the castle, and cannot stay with us.

A messenger has come from Meskakeh with an invitation from Jóhar for us, so we are going on there to-morrow. We are not, however, to stay with Jóhar, as he has no house of his own there, but with our relations, the Ibn Arûks, who have at last been really discovered. Nassr ibn Arûk, the head of the family, hearing of our arrival, has sent his son with every sort of polite message, and it is to his house we shall go. The young man is modest, and well-mannered, without pretension, honest and straightforward, if one can read any-

thing in faces; and evidently much impressed with the honour done him by our intended visit.

We have been making calls all the morning, first on our former host, Huseyn el-Kelb, and the other relatives, and then on one or two notables of the town. Huseyn says that the Beyt Habûb, mentioned by Mr. Palgrave, exists, but that the noblest of all the families is that of Mehsin ibn Dirra, formerly Sheykh of Jôf, but now reduced to the condition of one of the Emir's subjects. Ibn Dirra is not (Mohammed tells us) by any means pleased at the political changes in Jôf; but he is afraid to show more than a half-smothered discontent, for Mohammed ibn Rashid keeps a hostage for his good conduct in the person of his eldest son. This youth resides at Haïl, where he is not exactly a prisoner, but cannot return to his friends. At all the houses we were fed and entertained, having to drink endless cups of coffee flavoured with cloves (heyl), and eat innumerable dates, the *helwet el Jôf*, which they say here are the best in Arabia; they are of excellent flavour, but too sweet and too sticky for general use. The people of Jôf live almost entirely on dates; not, however, on the *helwet*, which are not by any means the common sort. There are as many varieties here of dates as of apples in our orchards, and quite as different from each other. The kind we prefer for ordinary eating is light coloured, crisp, and rounder than the helwet; while these are shapeless, and of the colour of a horse

chestnut. It is a great mistake to suppose that dates are better for being freshly gathered; on the contrary, they mellow with keeping. The sweeter kinds contain so much sugar, that when placed in an open dish they half dissolve into a syrup, in which the sugar forms in large lumps. I have no doubt that regular sugar could be manufactured from them.

The coffee making is much the same process here as among the Bedouins of the north, except that it is more tedious. First, there is an interminable sorting of the beans, which are smaller and lighter in colour than what one gets in Europe; then, after roasting, a long pounding in a mortar, though the coffee is never pounded quite fine; then an extraordinary amount of washing and rinsing of coffee-pots, five or six of them; and lastly, the actual boiling, which is done three times. The Jôf mortars are very handsome, of red sandstone, the common stone of the country, and are, I believe, an article of export. I should like to take one away with me but they are too heavy, a quarter of a camel load each. The design on them is simple but handsome, and I should not be surprised if it were very ancient. The only other manufactures of Jôf that I heard of, are cartridge belts and woollen abbas. The former are showy and tipped with silver, and all the servants have purchased them; the latter are made of wool brought from Bagdad. Awwad bought one for six and a half mejîdies.

We next had a look at the castle of Marid, the only building of stone in Jôf. Its construction dates, I should say, from mediæval times, certainly it is not classic, and it has no particular feature to make it interesting. It looks best at a distance. I find the map places it a long way from Jôf, but in reality it is within the walls of the town, on the western edge. It stands about 2000 feet above the sea.

While sitting in Ibn Dirra's house, we saw an instance of Ibn Rashid's paternal government, and the first sign of Wahhabism. The midday prayer was called from the roof of the mosque close by, for there is no minaret in Jôf, but for some time nobody seemed inclined to move, taking our visit as an excuse. Then an old man with a sour face began lecturing the younger ones, and telling them to get up and go to pray, and finding precept of no avail, at last gave them the example. Still the main body of the guests sat on, till suddenly up jumped the two young soldiers who had come with us, and shouting "kum, kum," get up, get up, set to with the flats of their swords on the rest and so drove them to the mosque, all but our host, whose position as such made him sacred from assault. It is very evident that religion is not appreciated here, and except the sour looking old man nobody seemed to take the praying seriously, for the soldiers when they had done their duty of driving in the others, came back without ceremony from the mosque.

The outward show of religion does not seem natural among the Arabs.

Another sword dance to-night, and another carouse on lemonade.

January 8.—A cloudy, almost foggy morning, and a shower of rain. We wished Dowass and his soldiers good-bye, and they really seemed sorry to part with us. They are extraordinarily good-tempered, honest people, and have treated us with great kindness. Dowass's last attention to me was the present of an enormous treng as big as a large cocoanut. The trengs are sour not sweet lemons, but they have a rind an inch thick, sweet enough to be eaten though very woolly.

Meskakeh, where we have come to-day, is about twenty miles from Jôf, and there is a well-beaten track between the two places. We were a rather numerous party, as several Jôfi came with us for company, and we have Areybi ibn Arûk, Nassr's son, and another Aruk, a cousin of his, and a man with a gun who is by way of going on with us to Haïl. All the party but ourselves were on foot, for the Jôfi never ride, having neither horses nor camels nor even donkeys. One of the men had with him an ostrich eggshell slung in a sort of network, and used like a gourd to hold water. He told me that ostriches are common in the Nefûd, which is now close by. The scenery all the way was fantastic, sometimes picturesque. First we crossed the punchbowl of Jôf to the other side,

passing several ruined farms, the ground absolutely barren, and the lowest part of it covered with salt. The whole of this depression is but a mile across. Then our road rose suddenly a hundred feet up a steep bank of sand, and then again a hundred and sixty feet over some stony ridges, descending again to cross a subbkha with a fringe of tamarisks just now in flower, then tracts of fine ironstone gravel, undistinguishable from sheep's droppings. About two hours from Jôf is a large water-hole, which the Jôfi call a spring, the water about eight feet below ground. In the wadys where water had flowed (for it rained here about a month ago), there were bright green bulbous plants with crocus flowers, giving a false look of fertility. In other places there were curious mushroom rocks of pink sandstone topped with iron, and in the distance northwards several fine masses of hill, Jebel Hammamíyeh or the pigeon mountains being the most remarkable. These may have been a thousand feet higher than Jôf. Far beyond, to the north-east and east, there ran a level line of horizon at about an equal height, the edge of the Hamád, for all the country we have been crossing is within the area of the ancient sea, which, we suppose, must have included the Wady Ṣirhán, Jôf, and Meskakeh.

On one of the rocks I noticed an inscription, or rather pictures of camels and horses, cut on a flat surface about five feet across. We could not, however, under the circumstances, copy it.

Meskakeh, though not the seat of Jóhar's government, is a larger town than Jôf,—seven hundred houses they say, and palm gardens at least twice as extensive as the other's. The position of the two towns is much the same, a broad hollow surrounded by cliffs of sandstone, but the Meskakeh basin is less regular, and is broken up with sandhills and outlying tells of rock. Meskakeh, like Jôf, has an ancient citadel perched on a cliff about a hundred feet high, and dominating the town. The town itself is irregularly built, and has no continuous wall round its gardens. There are many detached gardens and groups of houses, and these have not been ruined as those of Jôf have been by recent wars. Altogether, it has an exceedingly flourishing look, not an acre of irrigable land left unplanted. Everything is neat, and clean, the walls fresh battlemented, and every house trim as if newly built. The little square plots of barley are surrounded each by its hedge of wattled palm branches, and the streets and lanes are scrupulously tidy. Through these we rode without stopping, and on two miles beyond, to Nassr's farm. We are now in the bosom of the Ibn Arûk family, after all no myth, but a hospitable reality, receiving us with open arms, as if they had been expecting us every day for the last hundred years. They know the Ibn Arûk ballad and Mohammed's genealogy far better than he knows it himself, so for the time at least we may hope to be in clover, and if after all we get no further, we may feel that we have travelled not quite in vain.

CHAPTER VII.

"And Leah was tender eyed but Rachel was beautiful."—Book of Genesis.

The Ibn Arûks of Jôf—Mohammed contracts a matrimonial alliance—Leah and Rachel—We cheapen the bride's dower—A negro governor and his suite—A thunder-storm.

We stayed three days with Nassr and his sons, and his sons' wives and their children, in their quiet farm house. It was a rest which we much needed, and proved besides to be an interesting experience, and an excellent opportunity of learning more of Arab domestic life than we had done on our previous journeys. Not that the Ibn Arûks of Meskakeh are in themselves of any particular interest. Like their relations of Tudmur, they have been too long settled down as mere townspeople, marrying the daughters of the land, and adopting many of the sordid town notions, but they were honest and kind-hearted, and the traditions of their origin, still religiously preserved, cast an occasional gleam of something like romance on their otherwise matter of fact lives. Nassr, the best of the elder generation, resembled some small Scottish laird, poor and penurious, but aware of having better blood in his veins than his

neighbours—one whose thought, every day in the year but one, is of how to save sixpence, but who on that one day shows himself to be a gentleman, and the head of a house. His sons were quiet, modest, and unpretending, and, like most young Arabs, more romantically inclined than their father. They even had a certain appreciation of chivalrous ideas; especially Turki, the elder, in whom the Bedouin blood and Bedouin traditions predominated almost to the exclusion of commercial instincts, while in his brother Areybi, these latter more than counterbalanced the former. We liked both the brothers, of course preferring Turki, with whom Wilfrid made great friends.

Mohammed is less distantly related to these people than I had supposed. His ancestor, Ali ibn Arûk, was one of the three brothers who, in consequence of a blood feud, or, as Wilfrid thinks more likely, to escape the Wahhabi tyranny of a hundred years ago, left Aared in Nejd, and came north as far as Tudmur, where Ali married and remained. Another brother, Abd el-Kader ibn Arûk, had stopped at Jôf, settled there, and became Nassr's grandfather. As to the third, Mutlakh, the descendants of the two former know nothing of his fate, except that, liking neither Tudmur nor Jôf, he returned towards Nejd. Some vague report of his death reached them, but nobody can tell when or how he died. Nassr came from Jôf to Meskakeh not many years ago.

Nassr is now the head of the family, at least of that branch of it which inhabits the Meskakeh oasis. But there lives in an adjoining house to his, his first cousin, Jazi ibn Arûk, brother to our friend Merzuga, and father to two pretty daughters. These, with a few other relations, make up a pleasant little family party, all living in their outlying farm together.

Of course our first thought on coming amongst them was for a wife for Mohammed, at whose request I took an early opportunity of making acquaintance with the women of the family. I found them all very friendly and amiable, and some of them intelligent. Most of the younger ones were good looking. The most important person in the harim was Nassr's wife, a little old lady named Shemma (candle), thin and wizened, and wrinkled, with long grey locks, and the weak eyes of extreme old age; and, though she can have been hardly more than sixty, she seemed to be completely worn out. She was the mother of Turki and Areybi; and I had heard from Mohammed that Nassr had never taken another wife but her. In this, however, he was mistaken, for on my very first visit, she called in a younger wife from the adjoining room, and introduced her at once to me. The second wife came in with two little boys of two and three years old, the eldest of whom (for they all have extraordinary names) is called Mattrak, "stick;" in spite of which he seemed an amiable, good-

tempered child. In this he resembled his mother, whose respectful manner towards her elder, Shemma, impressed me favourably; she had, besides, a really beautiful face. The little boy, Mattrak, I recognised as a boy I had seen in the morning with old Nassr in our garden, and supposed to be his grandson. Nassr was doing his best to spoil the child, after the fashion of old men among the Arabs. I had then given Mattrak a little red frock, one I had bought for Sotamm's boy, Mansur, when we thought we were going to the Roala, and in this the child was now strutting about, showing off his finery to two very pretty little girls, his sisters. These two ran in and out during my visit, helping to bring bowls of dates, and to eat the dates when brought. Next appeared Turki's two wives, a pretty one and a plain one, and Areybi's one wife, pretty, and lately married. All these seemed to be on better terms with one another than is usually the case among mixed wives and daughters-in-law. They were extremely anxious to please me, and I, of course, did my best to satisfy their hospitable wishes about eating. They offered me dates of countless kinds, —dry ones and sticky ones, sweet and less sweet, long dried ones, and newer ones, a mass of pulp; it was impossible for one person to do justice to them all.

Shemma treated all the young people with the air of one in authority, though her tone with them was kind. She, however, spoke little, while the

others talked incessantly and asked all sorts of questions, requiring more knowledge of Arabic than I possessed to answer. In the middle of the visit, Nazzch, Nassr's married daughter, own sister to Turki and Areybi, arrived with her daughter, and an immense bowl of dates. She had walked all the way from the town of Meskakeh, about three miles, carrying this child, a fat heavy creature of four, as well as the dates, and came in, panting and laughing, to see me. She was pleasant and lively, very like her brother Turki in face, that is to say, good-tempered rather than good-looking. Any one of these young ladies, seen on my first visit, might have done for Mohammed's project of marriage, but, unfortunately, they were all either married or too young. I asked if there were no young ladies already "out," and was told that there were none in Nassr's house, but that his cousin Jazi had two grown-up daughters, not yet married; so I held my peace till there should be an opportunity of seeing them.

Mohammed, in the meantime, had already begun to make inquiries on his own account, and the first day of our visit was not over before he came to me with a wonderful account of these very daughters of Jazi. There were three of them, he declared, and all more beautiful each than the others, Asr (afternoon), Hamú, and Muttra—the first two unfortunately betrothed already, but Muttra still obtainable. I could see that already he was

terribly in love, for with the Arabs, a very little goes a long way; and never being allowed to see young ladies, they fall in love merely through talking about them. He was very pressing that I should lose no time about making my visit to their mother, and seemed to think that I had been wasting my time sadly on the married cousin. Mohammed has all along declared that he must be guided by my opinion. I shall know, he pretends, at once, not only whether Muttra is pretty, but whether good-tempered, likely to make a good wife. He had been calculating, he said, and thought forty pounds would be asked as her dower. It is a great deal to be sure, but then she was really "asil," and the occasion was a unique one—a daughter of Jazi!—a niece of Merzuga!—a girl of such excellent family!—an Ibn Arûk! and Ibn Arûks were not to be had every day!—forty pounds would hardly be too much. He trusted all to my judgment—I had so much discernment, and had seen the wives and daughters of all the Anazeh Sheykhs; I should know what was what, and should not make a mistake. Still, he would like Abdallah to go with me, just to spy out things. Abdallah, as a relation, might be admitted to the door on such an occasion, though he, Mohammed, of course could not; he might, perhaps, even be allowed to see the girl, as it were, by accident. With us, the Ibn Arûks, the wives and daughters are always veiled, a custom we brought with us from Nejd, for we are not

like the Bedouins; yet on so important an occasion as this, of arranging a marriage, a man of a certain age, a dependant, or a poor relation, is sometimes permitted to see and report. I promised that I would do all I could to expedite the matter.

Accordingly, the next day Turki was sent for, and a word dropped to him of the matter in hand, and he was forthwith dispatched to announce my visit to the mother of the daughters of Jasi—Mohammed explaining, that it was etiquette that the mother should be made acquainted with the object of my visit, though not necessarily the daughters. Then we went to Jazi's house, Turki, Abdallah, and I.

Jazi's house is close to Nassr's, only the garden wall dividing them, and is still smaller than his, a poor place, I thought, to which to come for a princess; but in Arabia one must never judge by externals. At the door, among several women, stood Saad, Jazi's eldest son, who showed us through the courtyard to an inner room, absolutely dark, except for what light might come in at the doorway. It is in Arabia that the expression "to darken one's door," must have been invented, for windows there are none in any of the smaller houses. There was a smell of goats about the place, and it looked more like a stable than a parlour for reception. At first I could see nothing, but I could hear Saad, who had plunged into the darkness, shaking something

in a corner, and as my eyes got accustomed to the twilight, this proved to be a young lady, one of the three that I had come to visit. It was Asr the second, a great, good-looking girl, very like her cousin Areybi, with his short aquiline nose and dark eyes. She came out to the light with a great show of shyness and confusion, hiding her face in her hands, and turning away even from me; nor would she answer anything to my attempts at conversation. Then, all of a sudden, she broke away from us, and rushed across the yard to another little den, where we found her with her mother and her sister Muttra. I hardly knew what to make of all this, as besides the shyness, I thought I could see that Asr really meant to be rude, and the polite manners of her mother Haliyeh and her little sister Muttra confirmed me in this ide . I liked Muttra's face at once; she has a particularly open, honest look, staring straight at one with her great dark eyes like a fawn, and she has, too, a very bright fresh colour, and a pleasant cheerful voice. I paid, then, little attention to Asr's rudeness, and asked the little girl to walk with me round their garden, which she did, showing me the few things there were to be seen, and explaining about the well, and the way they drew the water. The garden, besides the palm trees, contained figs, apricots, and vines, and there was a little plot of green barley, on which some kids were grazing. Muttra told me that in summer they

live on fruit, but that they never preserve the apricots or figs, only the dates. I noticed several young palm trees, always a sign of prosperity. The well was about ten feet square at the top, and carefully faced with stone, the water being only a few feet below the surface of the ground. Water, she told me, could be found anywhere at Meskakeh by digging, and always at the same depth. I was pleased with the intelligence Muttra showed in this conversation, and pleased with her pretty ways and honest face, and decided in my own mind without difficulty that Mohammed would be most fortunate if he obtained her in marriage. It was promising, too, for their future happiness, to remark that Haliyeh, the mother, seemed to be a sensible woman; only I could not understand the strange behaviour of the elder sister Asr. Abdallah, in the meanwhile, standing at the door, had made his notes, and come to much the same conclusion as myself; so we returned with an excellent report to give to the impatient suitor waiting outside.

Mohammed's eagerness was now very nearly spoiling the negociation, for he at once began to talk of his intended marriage; and the same thing happened to him in consequence, which happened long ago to Jacob, the son of Isaac. Jazi, imitating the conduct of Laban, and counting upon his cousin's anxiety to be married, first of all increased the dower from forty pounds to sixty, and then

endeavoured to substitute Leah for Rachel, the ill-tempered Asr for the pretty Muttra.

This was a severe blow to Mohammed's hopes, and a general council was called of all the family to discuss it and decide. The council met in our tent, Wilfrid presiding; on one side sat Mohammed, with Nassr as head of the house; on the other, Jazi and Saad, representing the bride, while between them, a little shrivelled man knelt humbly on his knees, who was no member of the family, but, we afterwards learned, a professional go-between. Outside, the friends and more distant relations assembled, Abdallah and Ibrahim Kasir, and half a dozen of the Ibn Arûks. These began by sitting at a respectful distance, but as the discussion warmed, edged closer and closer in, till every one of them had delivered himself of an opinion.

Mohammed himself was quite in a flutter, and very pale; and Wilfrid conducted his case for him. It would be too long a story to mention all the dispute, which sometimes was so warmly pressed, that negociations seemed on the point of being broken off. Jazi contended that it was impossible he should give his younger daughter, while the elder ones remained unmarried. "Hamú, it was true, was engaged, and of her there was no question, but Asr, though engaged too, was really free; Jeruan, the shock-headed son of Merzuga, to whom she was betrothed, was not the husband for her. He was an imbecile, and Asr would never marry him. If a girl

declares that she will not marry her betrothed, she is not engaged, and has still to seek a husband she likes. But this would not do. We cited the instance of Jedaan's marriage with an engaged girl, and the unfortunate sequel, as proving that Jeruan's consent was necessary for Asr, and Mohammed chimed in, "Ya ibn ammi, ya Jazi, O Jazi! O son of my uncle how could I do this thing, and sin against my cousin? How could I take his bride? Surely this would be a shame to us all." In fine, we insisted that Muttra it should be or nobody, and Asr's claim was withdrawn. Still it was pleaded, Muttra was but a child, hardly fifteen, and unfit for so great a journey as that to Tudmur. Where indeed was Tudmur? who of all the Jôfi had ever been so far? Mohammed, however, replied that if youth were an obstacle, a year or two would mend that. He was content to wait for a year, or two, or even for three years, if need were. He was an Ibn Arûk, and trained to patience. As to Tudmur, it was far, but had we not just come thence, and could we not go back? He would send one of his brothers at the proper time, with twenty men, thirty, fifty, to escort her. So argued, the marriage project was at last adopted, as far as Muttra was concerned. But the question of "settlements" was not as easily got over. Here it was very nearly being wrecked for good and all. Wilfrid had all along intended to pay the dower for Mohammed, but he would not say so till the thing was settled, and left Mohammed to fight out

the question of jointure to as good a bargain as they could make. This Mohammed was very capable of doing, despite the infirmity of his heart, and strengthened by Abdallah, who took a strictly commercial view of the whole transaction, a middle sum was agreed on, and the conference broke up.

Things, however, were not yet to go off quite smoothly. On the day following, when I went with some little presents for the bride to Jazi's house, I was met at the door by Jazi himself, who received me, as I at once perceived, with an embarrassed air, as also did Haliyeh, for both she and a strange relation were sitting in the kahwah. To my questions about Muttra short answers were given; and the conversation was at once turned on "the weather and the crops," or rather on that Arabian substitute for it, a discussion about locusts. We had had a heavy thunderstorm in the morning, for which all were thankful. It would bring grass in the Nefûd, but the locusts there, never were so numerous as this year. Again I asked about the girls, but again got no reply; and at last, tired of their idle talk, and quite out of patience, I exclaimed, "O Jazi, what is this? I trust that you—and you, O Haliyeh,—are pleased at this connection with Mohammed." To which he replied, in a sing-song voice, "Inshallah, inshallah," and Haliyeh repeated "Inshallah," and the stranger. I saw that something must be wrong, for it was no answer to my

question, and rose to go. Then Haliyeh went out with me into the yard, and explained what had happened. Asr, it appeared, with her violent temper, was frightening them all out of their wits. She would not hear of her sister being married before herself, or making so much better a match. Jeruan she despised, though he was Sheykh of Kâf; and she wanted to marry the Sheykh of Tudmur herself. She had tormented old Jazi into withdrawing his consent; and Muttra was afraid of her. What was to be done? I said it was no use arguing about this over again; that if she and her husband were really not able to manage their daughters, we must look out elsewhere for Mohammed; that I hoped and trusted Asr would not be so foolish as to stand in the way of her sister's happiness, for it would not profit her. This bad temper of hers made it more than ever certain that she could not marry Mohammed, and, in fine, that the family must make up their minds, yes or no, about Muttra, and at once, for we were leaving Meskakeh presently, and must have the matter settled. I then saw the two girls, and spoke to them in the same strain, and with such effect that a few hours later, Mohammed, who had fallen into low spirits about the affair, now came with a joyful countenance to say that the marriage contract would be signed that evening.

Signed, therefore, it was, though to the last moment difficulty on difficulty was raised, and a

lamentably haggling spirit displayed by all except Turki in the matter of the dower. Fifty Turkish pounds was, however, the sum ultimately fixed on; and Wilfrid refused curtly to advance a beshlik beyond it, even to buy off a cousin who unaccountably appeared on the scene and claimed his right to Muttra or an equivalent for her in coin. It was not very dignified this chaffering about price; and people do better in England, leaving such things to be settled by their lawyers.

Everything, however, was at last arranged, the marriage contract written out and signed, and everybody made happy. Then the rest of the evening was spent in jubilation. A kid was killed and eaten, songs sung, and stories told, nor was, as might be expected, the Arûk ballad left out of the programme. Nassr is a poet, and recited an ode impromptu for the occasion. Among the guests were two pilgrims from Mecca—so at least they called themselves—and some men who had run away from the Turkish conscription in Syria. These feasted with the rest, as though they too had been relations. And so ended Mohammed's marriage negociations. He is to come back next year or send for Muttra; but for the present he is to be content and wait.

While this family arrangement was in progress, we had also on hand a more important negociation of our own, and that was to get the governor's permission for our journey on to Haïl. The first

thing to be done was to make friends with Jóhar, for all in this despotic country depends upon his good will and pleasure; and if he had chosen to send us back to Kâf by the Wady Sirhán, I do not know that we could have offered any resistance. Jôf is not an easy place to get away from. It is more than three hundred miles from the nearest point on the Euphrates, and without the governor's leave no one would have dared to travel a mile with us. Accordingly, the day after our arrival at Meskakeh, we called on Jóhar, who had been warned of our visit, and received us in state.

Jóhar is a perfectly black negro, with repulsive African features; tall, and very fat, and very vain. He had put on his finest clothes to receive us, a number of gaudy silk jibbehs one over the other, a pair of sky-blue trousers—things new to us in Arabia—a black and gold abba, and a purple kefiyeh. His shirt was stiff with starch, and crackled every time he moved. He carried a handsome gold-hilted sword, and looked altogether as barbaric a despot as one need wish to see. He kept us waiting nearly ten minutes in the kahwah, to add, I suppose, to his importance, and then came in behind a procession of armed men, all of them well got up with silver hilted swords, silver ornamented belts, and blue and red kefiyehs bound with thick white aghals. He affected the affable, rather languid air of a royal personage, passing from one subject of

conversation to another without transition, and occasionally asking explanations of our remarks or questions from one or other of his attendants. It struck me as eminently absurd to see this negro, who is still a slave, the centre of an adulous group of white courtiers, for all these Arabs, noble as many of them are in blood, were bowing down before him, ready to obey his slightest wink and laugh at his poorest joke. After the first few moments of dignified silence, Jóhar, as I have said, became affable, and began asking the news. We had come from the north, and could tell him all about the war. What was Sotamm doing and what was Ibn Smeyr,—the latter evidently a hero with the Jôfi or rather with the Haïl people, for they are not friends with Sotamm, and old Mohammed Dukhi is considered Sotamm's great rival. We were glad to be able to say that we had seen Ibn Smeyr himself at Damascus not a month ago. Jóhar told us in return of a report recently brought in to Meskakeh by some Sleb that the Roala had been beaten in a fight with Mohammed Dukhi, and that Sotamm was killed—a report we were sorry to hear.

Then, but in a tone of minor interest, we were questioned about the Sultan. He had made peace with the Muscov, Jóhar was glad to hear it. Peace was a good thing, and now "inshallah es Sultan mabsutin," "the Sultan, let us hope, was pleased;" this with a mock sentimental, patronising accent and

a nasal twang in the voice, which was extremely comic. A little whispering then took place between Mohammed and one of the suite, which resulted in their going out together, to hand over to Jóhar the presents we had brought for him. Mohammed was, I believe, cross-questioned as to our position and the objects of our journey, and answered, as it had been agreed beforehand he should do, that we were going to Bussora to meet friends, and that we had come by way of Jôf to avoid the sea-voyage. This, though of course not by any means the *whole* truth, was true as far as it went, and was a story easily understood and accepted by those to whom it was told. Mohammed added, moreover, that as we had happened to pass through the Emir's dominions, the English Beg was anxious to pay his respects to Ibn Rashid at Haïl before going any further, and begged Jóhar to give us the necessary guides. This, after some discussion, and some coyness on the governor's part, he consented to do. His heart had been softened by the handsome clothes we had given him, and I believe a small present in money was also talked of between him and Mohammed.

When we were summoned again to Jóhar's presence, this time on the house-top, we found the negro's face wreathed in smiles, and our journey being discussed as a settled matter. Carpets were then spread, and we all sat down on the roof and had breakfast, boiled meat on rice, with a sharp sauce to pour over the rice, and then after the usual

washings and el hamdu lillahs we retired, extremely pleased to get away from the flies and the hot sun of Jóhar's roof; and not a little thankful for the good turn things had taken with us. As Wilfrid remarked, when we were well on our mares again and riding home, Jóhar was just the picture of a capricious despot, and one who, if he had been in a bad humour, might have ordered our heads off, with no more ceremony than he had ordered breakfast. Our last day at Meskakeh was a quiet one.

January 11.—Every morning since we have been here there has been a fog, and to-day (Saturday), as I have already said, it has rained heavily. The rain came with thunder and lightning, as I believe is almost always the case in this part of the world. I am much surprised to learn, in talking of the lightning, that nobody at Meskakeh has heard of people being killed by it, and Mohammed confirms the statement made here, by saying that the same is the case at Tudmur. He seemed astonished when I asked him, at lightning being thought dangerous, and says that accidents from it never occur in the desert. This is strange. The surface soil of Meskakeh is very nearly pure sand, and the rain runs through it as quickly as it falls, remaining only in a few hollows, where there is a kind of sediment hard enough to hold it.

In the afternoon the weather cleared, and we made a little expedition to the top of the low tell just outside Nassr's farm. The tell is of sandstone rock,

orange coloured below, but weathered black on the upper surface. It is not more than a hundred feet high, but standing alone, it commands a very extensive view, curious as all views in the Jôf district are, and very pretty besides. In the fore-ground just below lay the farm, a square walled enclosure of three or four acres, with its palms and ithel trees, and its two low mud houses, and its wells, looking snug and trim and well to do. Beyond, looking westwards, three other farms were visible, spots of dark green in the broken wilderness of sand and sandstone rock, and then behind them Meskakeh, only its palm-tops in sight, and the dark mass of its citadel rising over them in fantastic outline. The long line of the palm grove stretched far away to the south, disappearing at last in a confused mass of sand-hills. These specially attracted our notice, for they marked the commencement of the Nefûd, not indeed the great Nefûd, but an outlying group of dunes tufted with ghada, and not at all unlike those passed through by the Calais and Boulogne railway. Our route, we know, lies across them, and we are to start to-morrow.

While I sat sketching this curious view, Wilfrid, who had climbed to the top of a tall stone, crowning the hill, came back with the news that he had discovered an inscription. We have been looking out, ever since our arrival in the sandstone district, for traces of ancient writing, but have hitherto found nothing except some doubtful scratches, and a few

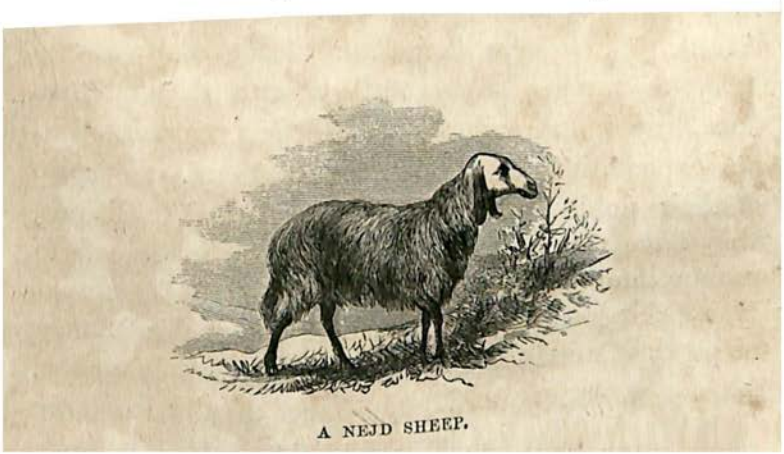
of those simple designs one finds everywhere on the sandstone, representing camels and gazelles. Here however, were three distinctly formed letters, Π H, Ϙ, two of them belonging to the Greek alphabet.

It was evident, too, by the colour of the incisions, that they had been there for very many years. On these we have built a number of historical conjectures relating to Meskakeh, and its condition in classical times.

When we came home again, we found that Mohammed had been to make the last arrangements with Jóhar for our journey. The great man had raised objections at one point of the negociations, but these had been settled by a *dahab* or gold piece, and he has now agreed to send a man with us, a professional guide for crossing the Nefûd. It seems that there are two lines by which Haïl may be reached, one of thirteen and the other of ten days' journey. The first is better suited, they say, for heavy laden camels, as the sand is less deep, but we shall probably choose the shorter route, if only for the sake of seeing the Nefûd at its worst. For the Nefûd has been the object of our dreams all through this journey, as the *ne plus ultra* of desert in the world. We hear wonderful accounts of it here, and of the people who have been lost in it. This ten days' journey represents something like two hundred miles, and there are only two wells on the way, one on the second, and another on the eighth day. The

guide will bring his own camel, and carry a couple of waterskins, and we have bought four more, making up the whole number to eight. This will have to suffice for our mares as well as for ourselves, and we shall have to be very careful. We have laid in a sufficient stock of dates and bread, and have still got one of the kids left to start with in the way of meat, the other has just been devoured as I have said, and cannot be replaced. Provisions of every kind are difficult to procure at Meskakeh; it was only by the exercise of a little almost Turkish bullying that Jóhar has been able to get us a camel load of corn.

The rain is over and the moon shining. All our preparations are made for crossing the Nefûd, and in a few hours we shall be on our way. We shall want all our strength for the next ten days.



A NEJD SHEEP.

CHAPTER VIII.

"We were now traversing an immense ocean of loose reddish sand, unlimited to the eye, and heaped up in enormous ridges running parallel to each other from north to south, undulation after undulation, each swell two or three hundred feet in average height, with slant sides and rounded crests furrowed in every direction by the capricious gales of the desert. In the depths between the traveller finds himself as it were imprisoned in a suffocating sand pit, hemmed in by burning walls on every side; while at other times, while labouring up the slope, he overlooks what seems a vast sea of fire, swelling under a heavy monsoon wind, and ruffled by a cross blast into little red hot waves."—PALGRAVE.

Mohammed in love—We enter the red sand desert—Geology of the Nefûd—Radî—The great well of Shakik—Old acquaintance—Tales of the Nefûd—The soldiers who perished of thirst—The lovers—We nearly remain in the sand—Land at last.

January 12.—We left the farm this morning in a thick fog, among the benedictions of the Ibn Arûks. They have treated us kindly, and we were sorry to say good-bye to them, especially to Turki and Areybi, although we are a little disappointed in our expectations of the family in general. In spite of their noble birth and their Nejdean traditions, they have the failings of town Arabs in regard to money, and it was a shock to our feelings that Nassr, our host, expected a small present in money at parting, nominally for the women, but in reality, no doubt, for himself. No desert sheykh, however poor, would have pocketed the mejidies. The boys too asked for gifts, the elder wanted a cloak, because

one had been given to his brother, the younger, a jíbbeh, because he already had a cloak; and other members of the household came with little skins full of dates or semneh in their hands, in the guise of farewell offerings, and lingered behind for something in return. All this of course was perfectly fair, and we were pleased to make them happy with our money; but it hardly tallied with the fine sentiments they had been in the habit of expressing, in season and out of season, about the duties of hospitality. Such small disappointments, however, must be borne, and borne cheerfully, for people are not perfect anywhere, and a traveller has no right to expect more abroad than he would find at home. In England we might perhaps not have been received at all, while here our welcome had been perfectly honest at starting, whatever the afterthought may have been. So Wilfrid solemnly kissed the relations all round, and exchanged promises of mutual good-will and hopes of meeting; I went in to the harim to say good-bye to the rest of the family, and fortunately was not expected to kiss them all round; and then we set out on our way.

Our course lay due south over the sand hills we saw yesterday, and presently these shut out Meskakeh and its palm groves from our view, and we were once more reduced to our own travelling party of eight souls, with Raḍi our new guide, and fairly on the road to Haïl. These sand dunes are not really

the Nefûd, and are much like what may be seen elsewhere in the desert, in the Sahara for instance, or in certain parts of the peninsula of Sinai. They are very picturesque, being of pure white sand, from fifty to a hundred feet high, with intervening spaces of harder ground, and are covered with vegetation. The ghada here grows quite into a tree, with fine gnarled trunks, nearly white, and feathery grey foliage. We met several shepherds with their flocks, sent here to graze from the town, and parties of women gathering firewood. Mohammed amused us very much all the morning, talking with these wood gatherers. He had managed to get a glimpse of his bride elect and her sister before starting, and fancies himself desperately in love, though he cannot make up his mind which of the two he prefers. Sometimes it is Muttra, as it ought to be, and sometimes the other, for no better reason, as far as we can learn, than that she is taller and older, for he did not see their faces. His conversations to-day with the wood gatherers shewed a *naïveté* of mind neither of us suspected. He would ride on whenever he saw a party of these women, and when we came up was generally to be found in earnest discussion with the oldest and ugliest of them on the subject of his heart. He would begin by asking them whether they were from Meskakeh, and lead round the conversation to the Ibn Arûk family, and if he found that the women knew them, he would vaguely ask how

many daughters there were in Jazi's house, and whether married or unmarried. Then he would hint that he had heard that the eldest one was very beautiful, and ask cautiously after the youngest, ending always by the disclosure that he himself was an Ibn Arûk from Tudmur, and that he was engaged to whichever of the two unmarried ones the old women had seemed to favour in their descriptions. By this process he had quite lost his head about both sisters, sometimes fancying that he was the happiest of men, and sometimes that Jazi had passed off the less valuable of his daughters upon him. On such occasions he would turn to me and beg me to repeat for the hundredth time my description of Muttra's merits, which consoled him until he met somebody else to raise new doubts in his mind.

After about eight miles of travelling through the sand dunes, we came out rather suddenly on the village of Kara, the last that we shall see for many a day. It is commanded by a rocky mound, with a ruin on it, and contains seventy or eighty houses; the palm grove surrounding it is remarkable for the palms and ithel trees. The fog had cleared off, and the sun was hot enough to make us glad to sit down for a few minutes under the mud wall which encloses the oasis. Some villagers came out, and we had a little chat about Kara and its sheykh, while our mares were being watered from a well close by. They told us we

should find a Roala camp not far upon our way, for the camels from it were watered from this very well. Formerly Kara, like Jôf and Meskakeh, was a fief of the Ibn Shaalans, and they still pay a small tribute to Sotamm, but in return they make the Bedouins pay for the water they use. There is no danger of being attacked by the Roala or anyone else, for we are in Ibn Rashid's country now, where highway robbery is not allowed. The villagers were very hospitable in their offers of entertainment if we would remain at Kara, but there was nothing in the place sufficiently interesting to detain us, so we went on. It contains, like Jôf and Meskakeh, a ruined castle on a low tell, but the ruins are now not much more than the foundations of old stone walls made without cement.

Not long after leaving the village, we came upon a party of Roala, with several hundred camels coming in to Kara for water. They were unarmed, and travelling as peaceably as peasants would in Italy. They told us their camp was out of our way, and too far off for us to reach to-night, but that we should find Beneyeh ibn Shaalan, a cousin of Sotamm's, near the well of Shakik our watering place for to-morrow. It argued well for the security of the country, to find parties of villagers, as we presently did, out in the sand dunes many miles beyond Kara, with all these Bedouins about. But really there seem to be law and order in Ibn Rashid's government. After travelling on for

another two hours and a half in broken ground, we came at last to a steep acclivity which proved, when we had mounted it, to be the further edge of the Meskakeh depression, and above it we found ourselves on a gravelly plain. The view from this edge, looking back, was very interesting, and gave us at once an idea of the geography of the whole country, the great basin of Meskakeh with its tells and sand hills, the long ridge of hill under which the oasis stands, the range of Jebel Hammamiyeh too, all mere islands in the basin, which seems moreover to include Jôf as well as the eastern villages in its main circuit. Wilfrid has little doubt now that Meskakeh and Jôf are really only the tail as it were of the Wady Sirhán or rather its head, for the whole must be in shape something like a tadpole, and this point its nose.

The Hamád or plain where we now were, is three hundred and fifty feet higher than Kara and Meskakeh, or 2220 feet above the sea. It is absolutely level and bare of vegetation, a flat black expanse of gravelly soil covered with small round pebbles, extending southwards to the horizon, and quite unlike anything in the basin below. We were much surprised to find such an open plain in front of us, for we had expected nothing now but sand, but the sand, though we could not see it, was not far off, and this was only as it were the shore of the great Nefûd.

At half past three o'clock we saw a red streak on

the horizon before us, which rose and gathered as we approached it, stretching out east and west in an unbroken line. It might at first have been taken for an effect of mirage, but on coming nearer we found it broken into billows, and but for its red colour not unlike a stormy sea seen from the shore, for it rose up, as the sea seems to rise, when the waves are high, above the level of the land. Somebody called out, "the Nefûd," and though for a while we were incredulous, we were soon convinced. What surprised us was its colour, that of rhubarb and magnesia, nothing at all like the sand we had hitherto seen, and nothing at all like what we had expected. Yet the Nefûd it was, the great red desert of central Arabia. In a few minutes we had cantered up to it, and our mares were standing with their feet in its first waves.

January 13.—We have been all day in the Nefûd, which is interesting beyond our hopes, and charming into the bargain. It is, moreover, quite unlike the description I remember to have read of it by Mr. Palgrave, which affects one as a nightmare of impossible horror. It is true he passed it in summer, and we are now in mid-winter, but the physical features cannot be much changed by the change of seasons, and I cannot understand how he overlooked its main characteristics. The thing that strikes one first about the Nefûd is its colour. It is not white like the sand dunes we passed yesterday, nor yellow as the sand is in parts of the

Egyptian desert, but a really bright red, almost crimson in the morning when it is wet with the dew. The sand is rather coarse, but absolutely pure, without admixture of any foreign substance, pebble, grit, or earth, and exactly the same in tint and texture everywhere. It is, however, a great mistake to suppose it barren. The Nefûd, on the contrary, is better wooded and richer in pasture than any part of the desert we have passed since leaving Damascus. It is tufted all over with ghada bushes, and bushes of another kind called *yerta*, which at this time of the year when there are no leaves, is exactly like a thickly matted vine. Its long knotted stems and fibrous trunk give it so much that appearance, that there is a story about its having originally been a vine. The rasûl Allah (God's prophet), Raḍi says, came one day to a place where there was a vineyard, and found some peasants pruning. He asked them what they were doing, and what the trees were, and they, fearing his displeasure or to make fun of him, answered, these are "yerta" trees, yerta being the first name that came into their heads. "Yerta inshallah, yerta let them be then," rejoined the prophet, and from that day forth they ceased to be vines and bore no fruit. There are, besides, several kinds of camel pasture, especially one new to us called adr, on which they say sheep can feed for a month without wanting water, and more than one kind of grass. Both camels and mares are therefore pleased with the

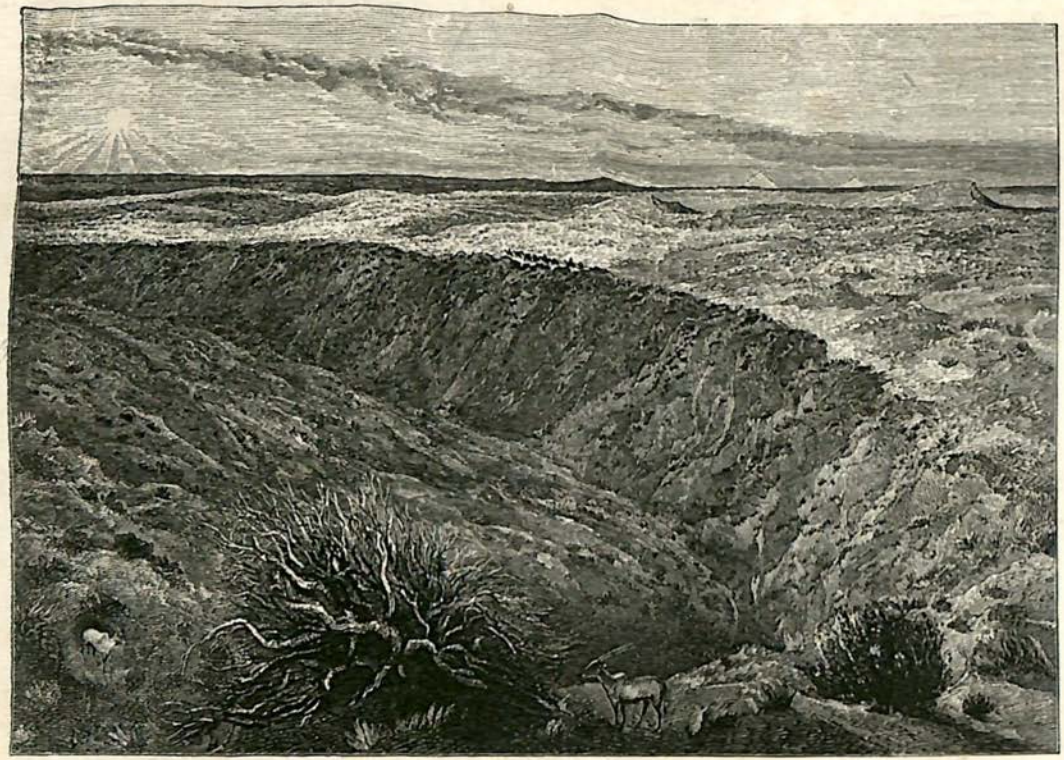
place, and we are delighted with the abundance of firewood for our camps. Wilfrid says that the Nefûd has solved for him at last the mystery of horse-breeding in Central Arabia. In the hard desert there is nothing a horse can eat, but here there is plenty. The Nefûd accounts for everything. Instead of being the terrible place it has been described by the few travellers who have seen it, it is in reality the home of the Bedouins during a great part of the year. Its only want is water, for it contains but few wells; all along the edge, it is thickly inhabited, and Raḍi tells us that in the spring, when the grass is green after rain, the Bedouins care nothing for water, as their camels are in milk, and they go for weeks without it, wandering far into the interior of the sand desert.

We have been travelling through the Nefûd slowly all day, and have occupied ourselves in studying its natural features. At first sight it seemed to us an absolute chaos, and heaped up here and hollowed out there, ridges and cross ridges, and knots of hillocks all in utter confusion, but after some hours' marching we began to detect a uniformity in the disorder, which we are occupied in trying to account for. The most striking features of the Nefûd are the great horse-hoof hollows which are scattered all over it (Raḍi calls them *fulj*). These, though varying in size from an acre to a couple of hundred acres, are all precisely alike in shape and direction. They resemble very exactly the track of

an unshod horse, that is to say, the toe is sharply cut and perpendicular, while the rim of the hoof tapers gradually to nothing at the heel, the frog even being roughly but fairly represented by broken ground in the centre, made up of converging water-courses. The diameter of some of these fuljes must be at least a quarter of a mile, and the depth of the deepest of them, which we measured to-day, proved to be 230 feet, bringing it down very nearly exactly to the level of the gravelly plain which we crossed yesterday, and which, there can be little doubt, is continued underneath the sand. This is all the more probable, as we found at the bottom of this deepest fulj, and nowhere else, a bit of hard ground. The next deepest fulj we measured was only a hundred and forty feet, and was still sandy at the lowest point, that is to say, just below the point of the frog. Though the soil composing the sides and every part of the fuljes is of pure sand, and the immediate surface must be constantly shifting, it is quite evident that the general outline of each has remained unchanged for years, possibly for centuries. The vegetation proves this; for it is not a growth of yesterday, and it clothes the fuljes like all the rest. Moreover, our guide, who has travelled backwards and forwards over the Nefûd for forty years, asserts that it never changes. No sandstorm ever fills up the hollows, or carries away the ridges. He knows them all, and has known them ever since he was a boy. "They were made so by

God." Wilfrid has been casting about, however, for some natural theory to account for their formation, but has not yet been able to decide whether they are owing to the action of wind or water, or to inequalities of the solid ground below. But at present he inclines to the theory of water. We shall be able perhaps to say more of them hereafter, when we have seen more of them, and I therefore reserve my remarks. We have had a long day's journey, plodding up to the camel's fetlocks in sand, and now it is time to look after Hanna, who is busy cooking. Height of our camp 2440 feet; but the highest level crossed during the day was 2560 feet. Nobody seen all day but one Roala on a delúl, who told us there was a camp to our left. We looked for it, but only made out camels at a great distance.

January 14.—Another bright clear morning, but with a cold wind from the south-east. Nothing can be more bright and sparkling than the winter's sun reflected from these red sands. The fuljes have again been the object of our attention. We find that they all point in the same direction, or nearly so, that is to say, with the toe of the horse-hoof towards the west, though the steepest part of the declivity varies a little, sometimes the southerly and sometimes the northerly aspect being more abrupt than that facing east. This would seem to point rather to wind than water as being the original cause of the depressions. At the edge, moreover, of



THE NEFUD; OR GREAT RED SAND DESERT OF ARABIA

[*Vol. I., p.* 160.

the large fuljes there is generally a tallish mound of sand with a ridge, such as one sees on the top of a snow peak, and evidently caused by the wind, the lee side being steep and the weather side rounded. These seem to change with a change of wind and are generally bare of vegetation, and what is singular, of a lighter coloured sand than the rest. One can guess the existence of a deep fulj from a long way off, by the presence of one of these snowy looking mounds on the horizon. It is seldom that one can see very far in the Nefûd, as one is always toiling up or down sandslopes, or creeping like a fly round the edges of these great basins. The ground is generally pretty even, just round the edges, and one goes from one fulj to another so as to take this advantage of level. We rode up to the top of one or two of the highest sand peaks, and from one of them made out a line of hills about fifteen miles off to the west-south-west, with an isolated headland beyond, which we recognized as the Ras el Tawíl pointed out to us the day we arrived at Jôf. From these heights too we could observe the lay of the fuljes, and make out that they followed each other in strings, not always in a straight line, but as a wady would go, winding gently about. This made us speculate on the water theory again. Wilfrid thinks that there may be a very gradual slope in the plain beneath the sand, and that whenever rain falls, as of course it must do here sometimes, it sinks through to the hard ground and flows under the

sand along shallow winding wadys, and that the sand in this way is constantly slipping very gradually down the incline, and wherever there is a slope in the plain below, there the fulj occurs above it.*

This notion is favoured by what we have observed of the bare places, where such occur, for they always slope down towards the west. Radi assures us that no water ever collects in the fuljes even after rain. It runs into them and disappears. While we were discussing these points of natural history, we suddenly perceived camels grazing at the edge of a fulj not half a mile below us, and jumped on to our mares in a great hurry. I have contrived a bandage which enables me to mount quickly, and ever since the ghazú in the Wady Sirhán, we keep a good look-out for enemies. We then rode down to see what was to be seen, and presently found half a dozen people, men and women, in a fulj, and several more camels grazing near a tent. The tent was a mere awning with a back to it, and as soon as they saw us the women ran and pulled it down, while the men rushed off to the nearest camels, and made them kneel. They were evidently in a fright, and so quickly was it all done that by the time we had ridden up, the tent and tent furniture, such as there was, were loaded and ready to go. The Arabs take pride in being able to strike camp and march at almost a moment's notice, and in this case I think it hardly took three

* A diagram, shewing what a section of the Nefûd would be like, is given in the geographical notes, Vol. ii., page 243.

minutes. They seemed much surprised and puzzled at our appearance when we rode up, and at first said they were Roala, but when our people joined us they confessed that they were of the Howeysin, a very poor tribe despised by the rest of the Bedouins and holding much the same position as the Sleb. They were, however, to our eyes undistinguishable from other Bedouins.

I asked Mohammed after this, how it was that in the desert each tribe seemed so readily recognized by their fellows, and he told me that each has certain peculiarities of dress or features well known to all. Thus the Shammar are in general tall, and the Sebaa very short but with long spears. The Roala spears are shorter, and their horses smaller. The Shammar of Nejd wear brown abbas, the Harb are black in face, almost like slaves, and Mohammed told me many more details as to other tribes which I do not remember. He said that Radi had recognised these people as Howeysin directly, by their wretched tent. He then reminded us of how we had been deceived last year by the ghazú we had met in the Hamád the day we found Jedaan. It was very lucky, he declared, that nothing disagreeable had happened then, for he had found out since that the nine people Wilfrid had ridden up to talk to, were in reality a ghazú of Amarrat, headed by Reja himself, Sheykh of the Erfuddi section of that tribe. Reja had come in not many weeks later to Palmyra to buy corn, and had stayed two days in

Abdallah's house, and had recognized him as the man who was with the Beg that day. These Amarrat had been in the act of discussing how they should attack our caravan when Wilfrid rode up, and the fact of his doing so alone made them imagine that our caravan was a very strong one, so they had decided on leaving us alone. Mohammed and Reja were now friends, Reja having given Mohammed a falcon on going away, and Mohammed the strange present of a winding-sheet. Winding-sheets he explains are much esteemed by the Bedouins, and this one had been made by Mohammed's mother.

Soon after this we came upon a real Roala camp, at least a camp of their slaves. The men were not negroes, though very dark and ill-looking. They explained that they belonged to Beneyeh ibn Shaalan, a cousin of Sotamm's, and the head of the tribe now in the Nefûd. They gave us some fresh camel's milk, the first we have tasted this year. We then began to descend into a long valley, which here intersects the Nefûd, and in which stand the wells of Shakik. Close to one of these we now are, camped on a bit of hard ground, under the first wave of sand beyond the wells. There are four wells known as Shakik; the one where we now are and another near it, and two others, three or four miles distant, up and down the valley. They are all, we hear, of the same depth, two hundred and twenty-five feet, and are apparently very ancient, for this one is lined with cut stones, and the edges

are worn through with long usage of ropes in drawing water. There is, however, here, a little wooden pulley for the rope to pass over, a permanent arrangement very unusual in the desert, where everything removable is as a matter of course removed. A rope or a bucket would have no chance of remaining a week at any well. There was a dead camel near the well, on which a pair of vultures and a dog were at work, but nothing else living.

While we were looking over our ropes, and wondering whether we could make up enough, with all the odds and ends tied together, to reach to the water, a troop of camels came flourishing down upon us, cantering with their heads out, and their heels in the air, and followed by some men on delúls. These proved to be Ibn Shaalan's people, and, to our great surprise and delight, one of them, a man named Rashid, recognized us as old acquaintances. We had met him the year before at the Roala camp at Saikal far away north. He had come, he said, with Abu Giddeli to our tent, and we remember the circumstance perfectly. It is pleasant to think of finding friends in such a place as this, and it shows how far the tribes wander during the year. Saikal is five hundred miles from Shakik, as the crow flies. Rashid at once offered to draw us all the water we wanted, for he had a long rope with him, and coffee was drunk and dates were eaten by all the party. Amongst them are two sons of Beneyeh's, Mohammed and Assad, the

elder a shy boorish youth, but the younger, nine years old, a nice little boy. To him we entrusted our complimentary message to his father. Beneyeh ibn Heneyfi ibn Shaalan is the Sheykh of a large section of the Roala, the very one we heard of last year as having stayed in Nejd. He is on ill terms with Sotamm on account of a chestnut mare Sotamm took from him by force, some years ago. The children had never seen a European in their lives, or been further north than the Wady Sirhán. We should like to pay Beneyeh a visit, but his tents are many miles out of our way, and we dare not trifle with the Nefûd.

A camel foal was born to-day by the well. I went to look at the little creature which was left behind with its mother, when the rest were driven home. I noticed that it had none of those bare places (callosities) which the older camels get on their knees and chest from kneeling down, and that its knees were bruised by its struggles to rise. We helped it up, and in three hours' time it was able to trot away with its mother.

January 15.—This morning, as I looked out of of the tent, I saw a halo round the moon, and thought there would be rain; but no such luck has come, though the sky was overcast and the day sultry. We made a great effort to get off early, and there was a great deal of "yalla, yalla" from Mohammed with very little result, for the men had been celebrating our passage of the Nefûd, which began

seriously to-day, with a final feast on kid, and were dull and slow in consequence. Wilfrid made them a short speech last night, about the serious nature of the journey we were undertaking, the hundred miles of deep sand we have to cross, and the necessity of husbanding all our strength for the effort. With the best despatch we can hardly hope to reach Jobba under five days, and it may be six or seven. No heavily laden caravan such as ours is, has ever, if we may believe Radi, crossed the Nefûd at this point, and if the camels break down, there will be no means of getting help, nor is there any well after Shakik. Abdallah has accordingly been made *sheykh of the water*, with orders to dole it out in rations every night, and allow nobody to drink during the day. The Arabs are very childish about meat and drink, eating and drinking all day long if they get the chance, and keeping nothing for the morrow. But here improvidence can only bring disaster, and we think Abdallah as well as Mohammed are impressed with the situation. There is something sobering and solemn in these great tracts of sand, even for the wildest spirits, and we have begun our march to-day in very orderly fashion.

Radi, the little guide (his name signifies *willing*), has proved a great acquisition to our party, willing to give every sort of information when asked, and not impertinently talkative. He is a curious little old man, as dry and black and withered as the dead stumps of the yerta bushes one sees here, the drift-

wood of the Nefûd. He has his delúl with him, an ancient bag of bones which looks as if it would never last through the journey, and on which he sits perched hour after hour in silence, pointing now and then with his shrivelled hand towards the road we are to take. He is carrying with him on his camel one of the red sand-stone mortars of the Jôf for a relation of Ibn Rashid's, and this seems to balance the water-skin hanging on the other side. From time to time, however, he speaks, and he has told us more than one interesting tale of those who have perished here in former days. In almost every hollow there are bones, generally those of camels, "Huseyn's camels," Radi calls them, and if anybody asks who Huseyn was, there is a laugh. At the bottom, however, of one fulj there are bones of another sort. Here a ghazú perished, delúls and men. They were Roala who had crossed the Nefûd to make a raid upon the Shammar, and had not been able to reach Shakik on their way back. The bones were white, but there were bits of skin still clinging to them, though Radi says it happened ten years ago. In another place, he shewed us two heaps of wood, thirty yards apart, which mark the spot where a Shammar ghazú, which had been lifting camels in the Wady Sirhán, was overtaken by their owner, a Sirhán sheykh, who had thrown his lance these thirty yards at the akid of the Shammar and transfixed him, mare and all. Again, he pointed out the remains of forty Suelmat camel

riders, who had lost their way, and perished of thirst.

The sand, for several miles after leaving the wells, was covered with camel tracks, Roala camels no doubt, and here and there we came across the track of a horse, but the further one gets into Arabia, the rarer horses seem to be. After these first few miles, however, there appeared no trace of living creatures except lizards. Radi took us first in a nearly southerly direction, till he hit a line of landmarks, invisible to us but well known to him, running south-south-east. This he calls *the road*, the road of Abu Zeyd, and told us the following legend in connection with it (there was no more trace of a road than there might have been on the sea). Many years ago, says Radi, there was a famine in Nejd, and the Beni Hellal were without bread. Then Abu Zeyd, sheykh of the tribe, spoke to his kinsmen Merrey and Yunis, and said, "Let us go out towards the west, and seek new pastures for our people," and they travelled until they came to Tunis el-Gharb, which was at that time ruled by an Emir named Znati, and they looked at the land and liked it, and were about to return to their tribe with the news, when Znati put them all into prison. Now Znati had a daughter who was very beautiful, named Sferi, and when she saw Merrey in the dungeon, she fell in love with him, and proposed that he should marry her, and promised that his life and all their lives should be spared. But Merrey did

not care for her and would not at first consent. Still she persisted in her love, and sought to do them good, and interceded with her father to spare their lives. Now Znati began to be perplexed with his prisoners, hearing from his daughter that they were of noble birth, and not knowing what to do with them. And when she told them this, they proposed that one of them should be released, and sent home to bring a ransom for his fellows, but in their hearts they were determined that Abu Zeyd should be the one sent, and that he should return, not with a ransom, but with all his people to Tunis, and so set them free. And Sferi carried the proposal to her father, and said, "Two of these men are of noble birth, but the third is a slave, but I know not which it is. Let then the slave go and get ransom for his masters." And Znati said, "How shall we discover the slave amongst them, and distinguish him from the others?" and she said, "By this. Take them to a muddy place, where there is water, and bid them pass over it. And you shall see that whichever is the slave amongst them will gather up his clothes about him carefully, while the nobly born will let their clothes be soiled." And her father agreed, and it happened so that on the following day the three men were brought out of their dungeon, and made to pass through a muddy stream. And Abu Zeyd, being warned by Sferi, put his abba on his head, and lifted up his shirt to the waist, while Merry and Yunis walked through without precaution. So Abu Zeyd

was set free and returned to Nejd, and gathering all his people together there, he led them across the Nefûd by this very way, making the road we had just seen, to enable them to come in safety. He then marched on to Tunis, and laid siege to the town.

Abu Zeyd beseiged Tunis for a year but could not enter, and he never would have taken it, but for Sferi who was plotting for his success outside. Sferi was a wise woman. She could read and write, and knew magic and could interpret prophecies. And there was a prophecy concerning Znati that he could be killed by no one in battle but by a certain Dib ibn Ghanim, a robber in the neighbouring desert. And Sferi sent word of this to Abu Zeyd, who took this robber into his service, and on the next occasion sent him against Znati when he came out to fight. And the Emir was slain.

Then Abu Zeyd became Emir of Tunis and Merrey married Sferi.

Such is Radi's story, which it may be hoped is not exactly true as to Sferi's betrayal of her father. As to the road legend, it is impossible to say that the road is there "to witness if he lies." Road or no road we have been wandering about in zigzags all day long, sometimes toiling up steep slopes, at others making a long circuit to avoid a fulj, and sometimes meandering for no particular reason yet always on a perfectly untrodden surface of yielding sand. The ground is more broken than ever, the fuljes bigger and the travelling harder. But both mares and

camels have marched bravely, and we have got over about twenty-one miles to-day. Our camp this evening, though in a fulj, is five hundred and sixty feet higher than the wells of Shakik.

January 16.—A thunderstorm in the night which has turned the sand crimson. Radi congratulates us upon this, as he says now we shall get to Jobba, inshallah! He seems to have been a little doubtful before. But the heavy rain has hardened the ground, and we have been able to push on at almost as good a rate as if we had been travelling on gravel. As we get deeper into the Nefûd, the fuljes are further apart and the cross ridges lower. The fuljes seem to run in pretty regular strings from east to west, or rather from east by south to west by north. It is interesting to observe the footmarks of wild animals on the sand, for they are now clearly marked as on fresh fallen snow. The most common are those of hares answering in size to our rabbits at home, and to-day the greyhounds have put up and coursed several of them, though quite in vain, for the ghada trees and bushes soon screen them from the dogs. We have had a gallop or two, and there is no danger of losing ourselves, for we only have to go back on our footsteps to find the caravan. Besides the hares there are several sorts of small birds, linnets, wrens, desert larks, wheatears, and occasionally crows. I also saw a pair of kestrels evidently quite at home. Reptiles are still much more numerous, the whole surface of

the desert being marked with lizard tracks, while here and there was the trail of a snake. Our people killed two to-day of the sort called *suliman*, common in most parts of the desert, a long, slim, silvery snake, with a little head, and quite harmless. The warm sunshine after the rain had brought them out. We have been inquiring of Radi after the more dangerous species, and he describes very accurately the horned viper and the cobra. I was surprised to hear of the latter, but it is impossible to mistake his description of a snake which stands on its tail, and swells out its neck like wings. These, he says, are only seen in the summer. Gazelles there seem to be none in the Nefûd, but we crossed the quite fresh track of two "wild cows" (antelope). This animal, Radi assures us, never leaves the Nefûd and never drinks. Indeed there is no water here above ground anywhere nearer than Jebel Aja, and it must be able to do without. The slot was about the size of a red deer fully grown. We are very anxious to see the beast itself, which they assure us is a real cow, though that can hardly be. We have also kept a good look-out for ostriches but without result. In the way of insects, we have seen a few flies like houseflies, and some dragonflies and small butterflies. There is a much better sort of grass in the Nefûd and more of it than on the outskirts, which I suppose is from the absence of camels.

I find that Radi makes out his course almost entirely by landmarks. On every high sand-hill he

gets down from his delúl, and pulls some ghada branches, which are very brittle, and adds them to piles of wood he has formerly made. These can be seen a good way off. We have learned, too, to make out a sort of road after all, of an intermittent kind, marked by the dung of camels, and occasionally on the side of a steep slope there is a distinct footway. Along this line our guide feels his way, here and there making a cast, as hounds do when they are off the scent. Neither he nor Mohammed, nor any of the Arabs with us, have the least notion of steering by the sun, and when Wilfrid asked Mohammed if he thought he could find his way back to Shakik, he answered, "How could I do so? Every one of these sand-hills is like the last."

We have been entertained by Radi with more blood and bones stories, the most terrible of which is that of some Turkish soldiers,* who many years ago were treacherously abandoned in the Nefûd. They had occupied Haïl in the days of the first Ibn Rashid, and had been left there as a garrison. But either the Sultan could not communicate with them or forgot them, and after a certain time they wished to go home. Many of them had died at Haïl, and the remainder of them, about five hundred, easily agreed to set out for Damascus under the escort of Obeyd, the Emir's brother, who had resolved to destroy them. They left Haïl on horseback and

* These were no doubt the Egyptians of Ibrahim Pasha's army, left behind at Aneyzeh.

followed their Shammar guides to this place, who to all questions as to where they should find wells, answered, a little further, a little further on. At last the Bedouins left them. They seem to have been brave fellows, for the last that was heard of them was a sort of song or chorus which they sang as they struggled on, "Nahnu askar ma nahnu atâsha nahnu askar ma benrîd moyeh." "We are not thirsty, we soldiers want no water." But at noon that day they must have lost heart, and lain down under the bushes to get a sort of shade, and so they were afterwards found scattered about in the different fuljes. Some of their horses made their way back to Jobba, and became the property of any who could seize them. They were sold by these lucky people for a few sheep or goats each. It is a ghastly tale.

A pleasanter one is that of two young lovers who eloped from Jôf, and were pursued by their relations. Suspecting that they would be tracked, and to avoid scandal, they had agreed that instead of walking together, they would keep parallel lines about a hundred yards apart and so set out on their journey, and when they came to a certain fulj, which Radi pointed out to us, they were too tired and lay down to die each under his bush. Thus they were found and fortunately in time, and their discretion so pleased the relations on both sides, that consent was given to their marriage, and the nuptials celebrated with rejoicings.

At half-past ten we suddenly caught sight of the

peaks of Aalem, two conical rocks which jut out of the sand, and make a conspicuous landmark for travellers on their way to Jobba. It was an immense relief to see them, for we had begun to distrust the sagaicty of our guide on account of the tortuous line we followed, and now we knew that the worst was over, and that if need were, we could find our way on across the other half of the Nefûd, with some prospect at least of success. We left our camels to follow, and rode on towards the hills. It still took us several hours to reach them, but we were by three o'clock touching the stones with our hands to feel that they were real. It was as if we had been lost at sea and had found a desert island.

We had some time to wait while the caravan laboured slowly on to join us. I remained with the mares and kept a look-out while Wilfrid climbed to the top of the smaller rock. "What a place to be buried in," he exclaimed. "Mount Nebo must have been like this." But people who die in the Nefûd have seldom anyone to bury them. As he clambered round the pile of loose stones near the top of the tell, he found to his great delight a painted lady butterfly sunning itself in a sheltered spot. If, as is probable, there is no vegetation suited for the caterpillar of this butterfly nearer than Hebron, this little insect must have travelled at least four hundred miles. Here it seemed happy in the sun. This smaller rock, or rocky hill, was just a hundred feet from the level of the plain,

and rose sheer out of it bare and naked as a rock does at sea. The barometer at the top of it shewed 3220 feet. The taller Aalem is perhaps three times its height.

Aalem, Radi says, is Sheykh of the Nefûd, and the little tell is his son. At some miles distance to the north-east there is a cluster of white sand-hills, Aalem's "harîm." The rocks of Aalem are sandstone weathered black, not granite as we had hoped, and this no doubt is the material from which in the lapse of years the great red sand heaps have been formed. They are not of solid rock but resemble heaps of stones. On the top of the one Wilfrid ascended was a cairn with the remains of some old letters scratched on the stones, of the same kind as those to be seen on Sinai, or rather in the Wady Mokattib. The view was, by Wilfrid's report, stupendous, but one impossible to draw or even attempt to draw. Here could be seen spread out as on a map the general features of the Nefûd, the uniformity of the ocean of sand streaked with the long lines of its fulges, Aalem itself rising in their midst like a rock out of a sea streaked with foam.

We are now encamped about two miles beyond Aalem. I have filled a bottle with sand to make an hour-glass with at home.

January 17.—A white frost, some of which was packed up with the tents and carried with us all day.

It is curious that now we have passed Aalem the vegetation has changed. Up to that point the ghada reigned supreme, and I could not have believed it could so suddenly disappear, yet such is the case. Now not a bush of ghada is to be seen, and its place is taken by the yerta which before was rare. It seems impossible to account for this, as there is no material change of level, and absolutely no change in the character of the soil. The bushes by which we camped last night were quite the last southwards. We are sorry to lose them, as ghada is the finest firewood in the world. Charcoal made from it, which one finds here and there where there has been a camp fire, is finer than the finest charcoal used for drawing. The yerta is inferior. On the other hand there is more of the grass called *nassi* for the camels, and of the *hamar*, a whitish-blue prickly plant which the mares are very fond of, while the *adr*, a shrub with stiff green leaves and brownish yellow flowers, is still the commonest plant.

The sand has dried again since yesterday, and as the day grew warmer became very heavy for the camels. The labour of trudging through the yielding surface is beginning to tell on them, and to-day most of our men have walked, Mohammed giving the example. Every one was cheerful, in spite of the hard work, and all showed wonderful strength in running on and playing pranks in the sand. Wilfrid, who is in fair training, was quite

unable to keep up with them, and I fared still worse as may be imagined, being as yet very lame; we both, however, felt bound to try and walk at intervals for the sake of our mares. Ibrahîm el-tawîl (the tall as contrasted with Ibrahim el-kasír, or the short), who has hitherto been the butt of the party, being sent down on fools' errands to fetch water from fuljes, and up to the tops of sand-hills, to see imaginary mountains, has proved himself to-day most valiant. He, although a Christian, is a match for any Moslem of the party, and gives as much as he takes in the rough games the Arabs indulge in to keep up their spirits. At one moment he got hold of the servants' tent pole, a very heavy one, and played at quarter-staff with it among them to such effect, that I thought there would have been bones broken. Abdallah, too, when there is any particularly hard piece of climbing to do and the rest seem fagged, generally runs on and stands on his head till they come up. We encourage this mirth as it makes the work lighter.

Our water is now running rather short, for we have had to divide a skin among the mares each day, but this lightens the loads. Two of the camels are beginning to flag, Hanna's delúl, which has hardly had fair play, as he and Ibrahim have been constantly changing places on its back, and making a camel kneel and get up repeatedly tires it more than any weight; also the beautiful camel we

bought at Mezárib. This last, in spite of his good looks, seems to be weakly. His legs are a trifle long, and his neck a trifle short, two bad points for endurance, and then he is only a three year old and has not had the distemper, at least so Abdallah says. A camel can never be depended on till he has had it. The ugly camel, too, which they call Shenuan, seems distressed. "He has certainly got the mange, and I wish we had insisted on this point when we suspected the camels at Damascus, but it is too late now. The rest are still in fine order, in spite of the long journey and the absence of fresh pasture, which at this time of year they require. Nothing green, has yet appeared, except a diminutive plant like a nemophila, with a purple flower which is beginning to show its head above the sand. Fresh grass there is none, and last year's crop stands white and withered still without sign of life.

We met a man to-day, a Roala, alone with twelve camels, yearlings and two year olds, which he had bought from the Shammar and was driving home. He had paid twenty-five to thirty-five mejidies apiece for them, but they were scraggy beasts. The Nejd camels are nearly all black, and very inferior in size and strength to those of the north. When we came upon the man we at first supposed he might be an enemy, for anybody here is likely to be that, and Awwad rushed valiantly at him with a gun, frightening him out of his wits and summoning him in a terrible voice to give an

account of himself. He was perfectly harmless and unarmed, and had been three nights out already in the Nefûd by himself. He had a skin of water and a skin of dates, and was going to Shakík, a lonely walk.

At half-past three (level 3040 feet) we caught sight of the hills of Jobba, and from the same point could just see Aalem. It was a good occasion for correcting our reckoning, so we took the directions accurately with the compass, and made out our course to be exactly south by east.

To-day all our Mahometans have begun to say their prayers, for the first time during the journey. The solemnity of the Nefûd, or perhaps a doubt about reaching Jobba, might well make them serious; perhaps, however, they merely want to get into training for Nejd, where Wahhabism prevails and prayers are in fashion. Whatever be the cause, Mohammed on the top of a sand-hill was bowing and kneeling towards Mecca with great appearance of earnestness, and Awwad recited prayers in a still more impressive manner, raising his voice almost to a chant.

Talking by the camp fire to night, Radi informs us that the Nefûd extends twelve days' journey to the east of where we now are, and eleven days' journey to the west. At the edge of it westwards, lies Teyma, an oasis like Jôf, where there is a wonderful well, the best in Arabia. We asked him about sand-storms, and whether caravans were ever buried

by them. He said they were not. The sand never buries any object deeply, as we can judge by the sticks and bones and camel-dung which always remain on the surface. The only danger for caravans is that a storm may last so long that their provision of water fails them, for they cannot travel when it is severe. Of the simum, or poisonous wind spoken of by travellers, he has never heard, though he has been travelling to and fro in the Nefûd for forty years. Abdallah, however, says he has heard of it at Tudmur, as of a thing occurring now and again. None of them have ever experienced it.

January 18.—A calm night with slight fog, hoar frost in the morning.

It appears that there was a scout or spy about our camp in the night from the Shammar. We had been sighted in the afternoon, and he had crept up in the dark to find out who we were. At first he thought we were a ghazú, but afterwards recognised Radi's voice, and knew we must be travellers going to Ibn Rashid. He came in the morning and told us this; and that he was out on a scouting expedition to look for grass in the Nefûd. He seemed rather frightened, and very anxious to please; and assured us over and over again that Mohammed Ibn Rashid would be delighted to see us.

It has been another hard day for the camels. Shenuan has broken down and cannot carry his load; and Hanna, like the rest of the men, has had to walk, for his delúl is giving in. The sand seems

to get deeper and deeper; and though we have been at work from dawn to dusk, we are still ten or fifteen miles from Jobba. But for the hills which we see before us every time we rise to the crest of a wave, it would be very hopeless work. Every one is serious to-night.

Sunday, January 19.—A terrible day for camels and men. Hanna's delúl, Shenuan, and the tall camel they call "Amúd," or the "Pillar," refused their aliek last night, being too thirsty to eat; and to-day they could carry no loads. Shakran, too, who has hitherto been one of our best walkers, lagged behind; and the whole pace of the caravan has been little over a mile an hour. But for the extraordinary strength of Hatherán, the gigantic camel which leads the procession, and on whom most of the extra loads have been piled, we should have had to abandon a great part of our property; and, indeed, at one moment it seemed as if we should remain altogether in the Nefûd, adding a new chapter to old Radi's tales of horror. And now that we have escaped such a fate and have reached Jobba, we can see how fortunate we have been. But for the perfect travelling weather throughout our passage of the Nefûd, and the extraordinary luck of that thunderstorm, we should not now be at Jobba. The sand to tired camels is like a prison, and in the sand we should have remained. Mohammed, Abdallah, and the rest all behaved like heroes; even old Hanna, with stray

locks of grey hair hanging from under his kefiyeh, for he has grown grey on the journey, and his feet bare, for it is impossible to walk in shoes, trudged on as valiantly as the most robust of the party. All were cheerful and uncomplaining, though the usual songs had ceased, and they talked but little.

Wilfrid and I were the only ones who rode at all, except Hanna, whom Wilfrid forced to ride his mare from time to time, and we were the gloomiest of the party. We felt annoyed at being unable to do our work on foot with the others; though from time to time we walked or rather waded through the sand, until obliged to remount for lack of breath and strength. Neither of us could have kept up on foot; but a European is no match for even a town Arab in the matter of walking.

To-day the *khall Abu Zeyd* (Abu Zeyd's road) was distinctly traceable, and we begin to think that it may not have been altogether a romance. There are regular cuttings in some places, and the track is often well marked for half a mile together. Radi assures us that there is a road of stone under the sand; of stone brought from Jebel Shammar at, I am afraid to say, what expense of camels and men, who died in the work. I noticed to-day a buzzard and a grey shrike; and a couple of wolves had run along the road, as one could see by their footmarks and the scratchings on the sand.

The level of the Nefûd had been rising all day, and at one o'clock we were 3300 feet above the

sea. From this point we had a large view southwards, sand, all sand still for many a mile; but close before us the group of islands we had so long been steering for, the rocks of Jobba. The nearest was not two miles off. We could see nothing of the oasis, for it was on the other side of the hills; but we could make out a wide space bare of sand, which looked like a subbkha, and beyond this a further group of rocks of exceedingly fantastic outline, rising out of the sand. It was like a scene on some great glacier in the Alps. Beyond again, lay a faint blue line of hills. "Jebel Shammar. Those are the hills of Nejd," said Radi. They were what we have come so far to see.

We made haste now to get to the rocks, and reached them at half-past three. They were of the same character as Aalem, sand and ironstone. There Wilfrid took a map, and I a sketch, and we waited till the camels came up; a doleful string they were as we looked down from the top of our rocky hill at them passing below. Shenuan and Amûd toiled on with only their saddles, and the poor black delúl, absolutely bare and hardly able to walk, was fifty yards behind, urged along by Abdallah. We still had some miles to go to get to Jobba, but on harder ground and all down hill; and Mohammed proposed that we three should ride on, and prepare a place for the camels in the village. On our way we saw what we thought was a cloud of smoke moving from west to east, and the tail of it passed over us. We found

it was a flight of locusts in the red stage of their existence, which the people here prefer for eating, but we did not care to stop now to gather them, and rode on. It was nearly sunset when we first saw Jobba itself, below us at the edge of the subbkha, with dark green palms cutting the pale blue of the dry lake, and beyond that a group of red rocks rising out of the pink Nefûd; in the foreground yellow sand tufted with adr; the whole scene transfigured by the evening light, and beautiful beyond description.

DELÚL RIDER.

CHAPTER IX.

"They went till they came to the Delectable Mountains, which mountains belong to the Lord of that hill of which we have spoken."

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS.

Jobba—An unpleasant dream—We hear strange tales of Ibn Rashid—Romping in the Nefûd—A last night there—The Zodiacal light—We enter Nejd—The granite range of Jebel Shammar.

JOBBA is one of the most curious places in the world, and to my mind one of the most beautiful. Its name Jobba, or rather Jubbeh, meaning a well, explains its position, for it lies in a hole or well in the Nefûd; not indeed in a fulj, for the basin of Jobba is on quite another scale, and has nothing in common with the horse-hoof depressions I have hitherto described. It is, all the same, extremely singular, and quite as difficult to account for geologically as the fuljes. It is a great bare space in the ocean of sand, from four hundred to five hundred feet below its average level, and about three miles wide; a hollow, in fact, not unlike that of Jôf, but with the Nefûd round it instead of sandstone cliffs. That it has once been a lake is pretty evident, for there are distinct water marks on the rocks which

crop up out of its bed just above the town; and, strange to say, there is a tradition still extant of there having formerly been water there. The wonder is how this space is kept clear of sand. What force is it that walls out the Nefûd and prevents encroachment? As you look across the subbkha or dry bed of the lake, the Nefûd seems like a wall of water which must overwhelm it, and yet no sand shifts down into the hollow, and its limits are accurately maintained.

The town itself (or village, for it has only eighty houses) is built on the edge of the subbkha, 2860 feet above the sea, and has the same sort of palm gardens we saw at Jôf, only on a very small scale. The wells from which these are watered are seventy-five feet deep, and are worked, like all the wells in Arabia, by camels. The village is extremely picturesque, with its little battlemented walls and its gardens. At the entrance stand half a dozen fine old ithel-trees with gnarled trunks and feathery branches. The rocks towering above are very grand, being of purple sandstone streaked and veined with yellow, and having an upper facing of black. They are from seven hundred to eight hundred feet high, and their bases are scored with old water marks. Wilfrid found several inscriptions in the Sinaïtic character upon them. Jobba is backed by these hills, and by a strip of yellow sand, like the dunes of Ithery, on which just now there are brilliantly green tufts of adr in full leaf. Beyond the subbkha the rocks of

Ghota rising out of the Nefûd remind one of the Aletsch Glacier, as seen from the Simplon Road.

So much for the outer face of Jobba. The interior is less attractive. The houses are very poor, and less smartly kept than those of Kâf and Ithery. I can hardly call them dirty, for dirt in this region of sand is almost an impossibility. It is one of the luxuries of the Nefûd that no noxious insects are found within its circuit. The Nefûd and, indeed, Nejd, which lies beyond it, are free from those creatures which make life a torment in other districts of the East. Even the fleas on our greyhounds died as soon as they entered the enchanted circle of red sand. But Jobba would be dirty if it could; and its inhabitants are the least well-mannered of all the Arabs we saw in Nejd. The fact is, the people are very poor and have no communication with the outer world, except when the rare travellers between Haïl and Jôf stop a night among them. At the time of our passage through Jobba, the Sheykh had lately died, and his office was being held by a young man of two or three and twenty, who had no authority with his fellow-youths, a noisy, good-for-nothing set. Ibn Rashid has no special lieutenant at Jobba, and the young Sheykh Naïf was unsupported by any representative of the central government, even a policeman. The consequence was that though entertained hospitably enough by Naïf, we were considerably pestered by his friends, and made to feel not a little uncomfort-

able. I quote this as a single instance of incivility in a country where politeness is very much the rule.

The style of our entertainment at Naïf's house requires no special mention, as it differed in no respect from what we had already received elsewhere. There was a great deal of coffee drinking, and a great deal of talk. Wherever one goes in Arabia one only has to march into any house one pleases, and one is sure to be welcome. The kahwah stands open all day long, and the arrival of a guest is the signal for these two forms of indulgence, coffee and conversation, the only ones known to the Arabs. A fire is instantly lighted, and the coffee cups in due course are handed round. One curious incident, however, of our stay at Jobba must be related.

For some days before our arrival there Mohammed, who was usually careless enough about the dangers of the road, had betrayed considerable uneasiness whenever there was a question of meeting Arabs on the way or making new acquaintances. He had dissuaded us more than once from looking about for tents; and when we had met the solitary man with the camels and the man we called the spy, he had given very short answers to their inquiries of who we were, and where we were going. It was not till the evening of our arrival at Jobba that he explained the cause of his anxiety. It then appeared that Radi in the course of conversation had mentioned the name of a certain Shammar Sheykh, one Ibn

Ermal, as being in the neighbourhood, and Mohammed had remembered that many years ago a Sheykh of that name had made a raid against Tudmur. There had been some fighting, and a man or two killed on the Shammar side; and this was enough to make it extremely probable that a blood-feud might be still unsettled between his family and the Ibn Ermals. He therefore begged us not to mention his name in Jobba, or the fact that he and Abdallah were Tudmur men. He had the more reason for this because he had discovered that Naïf, our host, was himself related to the Ibn Ermals; and it was fortunate that Tudmur had not yet been mentioned by any one in conversation. Later on in the evening he came to us very radiant, with the news that we need no longer be under any apprehension. He had managed ingeniously to lead the conversation with Naïf to the subject he had at heart, and had just learned that the blood-feud was considered at an end. Mohammed ibn Rashid, before he came to the Sheykhat of Jebel Shammar, was Emir el-Haj, or Prince of the pilgrimage to Mecca, a position of honour and profit, under his brother Tellál, and in that capacity had made acquaintance with several Tudmuri at the holy cities, and when he succeeded to the Sheykhat he had good-naturedly composed their difference with his people. He had either paid the blood-money himself, or had used pressure on Ibn Ermal to forego his revenge, and the blood-feud had been declared

cancelled. Whatever the Emir's reason for acting thus as peace maker, it was a very fortunate circumstance for us, and now Mohammed and Naïf were the best of friends. On the morning, however, of our departure from Jobba (we stayed there two nights), Naïf, in wishing Mohammed good bye, narrated that he had had a curious dream that night. He had gone to sleep, he said, thinking of this old feud; and in his sleep he thought he heard a voice reproaching him with having neglected his duty of taking just revenge on the man who was his guest, and he had been much distressed between the conflicting duties of vengeance and hospitality, so that he had got up in his sleep to feel about for his sword, and had found himself doing this when he woke. Then he had remembered that the feud was at an end, and said El hamdu lillah, and went to sleep again. "What a dreadful thing it would have been," he said to Mohammed at the end of this story, "if I had been obliged to kill you, you, my guest!" Mohammed, however, maintained to us that even if the blood-feud had not been settled, Naïf would not have been bound to do anything, once he had eaten and drunk with him in his house. Such, at least, would be the rule at Tudmur, though morals might be stricter in Nejd.

We only stayed, as I have said, two nights with Naïf. The young people of the village were inquisitive and obtrusive, and we were obliged to make a sort of scene with our host about it, a thing

which is disagreeable, but sometimes necessary. I dare say they meant no harm, but their manners were bad, and there was something almost hostile in their tone about Nasrani (Nazarenes or Christians), which it was advisable to check. I am glad to say that this is the only instance we have had in Arabia of unpleasant allusions to religion. The Arabs are by nature tolerant to the last degree on this point, and national or religious prejudices are exceedingly rare.

This little episode, however, made us rather anxious about our possible reception at Haïl. No European nor Christian of any sort had penetrated as such before us to Jebel Shammar, and all we knew of the people and country was the recollection of Mr. Palgrave's account of his visit there in disguise sixteen years before. Ibn Rashid, for all we knew, might be as ill-disposed towards us as these Jobbites here, and it was clear that, without his countenance and protection, we should be running considerable risk in entering Haïl. Still, the die was cast. We had crossed our Rubicon, the Red Desert, and there was no turning back. There was nothing to be done but to put a good face on things and proceed on our way. We cross questioned Radi as to the state of affairs at Haïl, and I may as well give here the whole of the information he gave us, corroborated and amplified by subsequent narrators. The main facts we learned from him.

Radi, in the first place, confirmed in general

terms the account we had already heard of the history of the Ibn Rashid family. About fifty years ago, Abdallah ibn Rashid, at that time "a mere *zellem*," individual, of the Abde section of the Shammar tribe, took service with the Ibn Saouds of Upper Nejd, and was appointed lieutenant of Jebel Shammar, by the Wahhabi Emir. He was a great warrior, and reduced the whole country to order with the help of his brother Obeyd, the principal hero of Shammar tradition. Of Obeyd we heard nothing to confirm the evil tales mentioned by Mr. Palgrave. On the contrary, he has left a great reputation among the Arabs for his hospitality, generosity, and courage, the three cardinal virtues of their creed. He was never actually Emir of Jebel Shammar, but after his brother's death he virtually ruled the country. It was he that counselled the destruction of the Turkish soldiers in the Nefûd. He lived to a great age, and died only nine years ago, having been paralysed from the waist downwards for some months before his death. It is related of him that he left no property behind him, having given away everything during his lifetime—no property but his sword, his mare, and his young wife. These he left to his nephew Mohammed, ibn Rashid, the reigning Emir, with the request that his sword should remain undrawn, his mare unridden, and his wife unmarried for ever afterwards. Ibn Rashid has respected his uncle's first two wishes, but he has taken the wife into his own harim.

Abdallah ibn Rashid died in 1843, and was succeeded in the Sheykhat of the Shammar and the lieutenancy of Haïl, by his son Tellál, who took the title of Emir, and made himself nearly independent of the Wahhabi government. There is not much talk at Haïl now about Tellál. He has left behind him little of the reputation one would expect from Mr. Palgrave's account of him. In his time, his second brother and successor, Metaab, conquered Jôf and Ithery, and Metaab's name is much more frequently mentioned than Tellál's. About twelve years ago Tellál went out of his mind and committed suicide. He stabbed himself at Haïl with his own dagger. He left behind him several sons, the eldest of whom was Bender, and two brothers, Metaab and Mohammed, besides his uncle Obeyd, then a very old man, and several cousins. Bender was quite a boy at the time, and Metaab succeeded Tellál with the approval of all the family. Metaab, however, only ruled for three years, and dying rather suddenly, a dispute arose as to the succession. Mohammed, who for some years had been acting as Emir el-Haj, or leader of the pilgrims, was away from Haïl, settling a matter connected with his office with Ibn Saoud at Riad, and Bender, being now twenty years old, was proclaimed Emir. He was supported by all the family except Mohammed and Hamúd, Obeyd's eldest son, who had been brought up with Mohammed as a brother. Mohammed, when he heard of this, was very angry, and for many days, so

Raḍi told us, sat with his kefiyeh over his face like one in grief, and refused to speak with anyone. He remained at Riad, rejecting all Bender's advances and invitations until Obeyd was dead, when he consented to return to Haïl, and resume his post with the Haj. This post brought him in much money, and he was fond of money. But he plotted all the while for the Sheykhat, intriguing with the Sherarât and other Bedouins under Bender's rule. It was in this way that he ultimately gratified his ambition, for it happened one day that a caravan of Sherarât came to Haïl to buy dates, and placed themselves under Mohammed's protection instead of the Emir's. This made Bender very angry, and he sent for Mohammed, and asked him the meaning of this insolence. "Are you Sheykh," he asked, "or am I?" He then mounted his mare and rode out, threatening to confiscate the Sherarât camels, for they were encamped under the walls of Haïl. But Mohammed followed him, and riding with him, a violent dispute arose, in which Mohammed drew his *shabriyeh* (a crooked dagger they all wear in Nejd), and stabbed his nephew, who fell dead on the spot. Then Mohammed galloped back to the castle, and, finding Hamúd there, got his help and took possession of the place. He then seized the younger sons of Tellál, Bender's brothers, all but one child, Naïf, and Bedr, who was away from Haïl, and had their heads cut off by his slaves in the courtyard of the castle. They say, however, that Hamúd pro-

tested against this. But Mohammed was reckless, or wished to strike terror, and not satisfied with what he had already done, went on destroying his relations. He had some cousins, sons of Jabar, a younger brother of Abdallah and Obeyd; and these he sent for. They came in some alarm to the castle, each with his slave. They were all young men, beautiful to look at, and of the highest distinction; and their slaves had been brought up with them, as the custom is, more like brothers than servants. They were shown into the kahwah of the castle, and received with great formality, Mohammed's servants coming forward to invite them in. It is the custom at Haïl, whenever a person pays a visit, that before sitting down, he should hang up his sword on one of the wooden pegs fixed into the wall, and this the sons of Jabar did, and their slaves likewise. Then they sat down, and waited and waited, but still no coffee was served to them. At last Mohammed appeared surrounded by his guard, but there was no "salaam aleykum," and instantly he gave orders that his cousins should be seized and bound. They made a rush for their swords, but were intercepted by the slaves of the castle, and made prisoners. Mohammed then, with horrible barbarity, ordered their hands and their feet to be cut off, and the hands and the feet of their slaves, and had them, still living, dragged out into the courtyard of the palace, where they lay till they died. These ghastly crimes, more ghastly than ever

in a country where wilful bloodshed is so unusual, seem to have struck terror far and wide, and no one has since dared to raise a hand against Mohammed. Now he is said to have repented of his crimes, and to be "angry with himself" for what he has done. But Raḍi is of opinion that Heaven is at least as angry, for though Mohammed has married over and over again, he has never been blessed with a son, nor even with a daughter. His rule, however, apart from its evil commencement, though firm, has been beneficent. The only other persons, with one exception, who have suffered death during his reign, have been highway robbers, and these are now extirpated within three hundred miles of Haïl. A traveller may go about securely in any part of the desert with all his gold in his hand, and he will not be molested. Neither are there thieves in the towns. He has made Jebel Shammar definitely independent of Riad, and has resisted one or two attempted encroachments by the Turks. He is munificent to all, and exercises unbounded hospitality. No man, rich or poor, is ever sent away from his gate unfed, and seldom without a present of clothes or money; and hospitality in Arabia covers a multitude of sins. Besides, the Arabs easily forget, and Mohammed is already half forgiven. "Allah yetowil omrahu," God grant him long life, exclaimed Raḍi, after giving us these particulars.

The one exception I have alluded to was this. About two years after Mohammed had gained the

Sheykhat, Bedr, the second son of Tellál, who had escaped the massacre of his brothers, began to grow a beard, and in Arab opinion was come of age; and being a youth of high spirit and high principle, resolved to avenge his brothers' deaths. This was clearly his duty according to Arab law. He was alone and unaided, except by some former slaves of his father's, to whose house at Haïl he returned secretly. With their assistance, he made a plan of falling upon Mohammed one day when he was paying a visit to Hamúd in Hamúd's house next the castle. He went with one slave to the house, and asking admittance was shown into the kahwah, where, if he had found the Emir, he would have drawn his sword and killed him; but, as it happened, Mohammed had just gone out into the garden, and only Hamúd was present. Hamúd asked him what he wanted, and he said he wished to speak to the Emir, but Hamúd suspecting something, detained him and gave Mohammed warning. When arrested and recognised, Bedr was cross-questioned again, and then declared his intention of avenging his brother Bender's death, nor would he desist from this. Mohammed, it is said, besought him to hear reason, and offered to release him, if he would be content to let matters alone. "I do not wish to shed more blood," he said, "but you must promise to leave Haïl." Still the young man refused, and at last in despair, Mohammed ordered his execution. The slave, who accompanied

Bedr, was not ill-used. Indeed, Mohammed sent him away with gifts, and he now resides very comfortably at Samawa on the Euphrates.

After this, Mohammed, who seems to have really felt remorse for his wickedness, sent for Naïf, the remaining son of Tellál, who was still a boy, and took him to live with him, and treated him as his own son. Only a year ago, seeing the boy growing up, he exhorted him to marry, offering him one of his nieces and a fitting establishment. But the boy, they say, hung back. "What!" he said, "you would treat me as you treat a lamb or a kid which you fatten before you kill it?" Mohammed wept and entreated, and swore that he would be as a father to Naïf; and the youth still lives honourably treated in the Emir's house. Opinion at Haïl, however, is very decided that as soon as Naïf is old enough, either he or his uncle must die. It will be his duty to follow Bedr in his attempt, and if need be, to end like him.

All this, as may be supposed, was anything but agreeable intelligence to us, as we travelled on to Haïl. We felt as though we were going towards a wild beast's den. In the meantime, however, there were four days before us, four days of respite, and of that tranquillity which the desert only gives, and we agreed to enjoy it to the utmost. There is something in the air of Nejd, which would exhilarate even a condemned man, and we were far from being condemned. It is impossible to feel really distressed or

really anxious, with such a bright sun and such pure delicious air. We might feel that there was danger, but we could not feel nervous.

Our last three nights in the Nefûd were devoted to merriment, large bonfires of yerta, round which we sat in the clear starlight, feasting on dates bought at Jobba, and feats of strength and games among the servants. I will give the journal for one day, the 22nd of January: "We have been floundering along in the deep sand all day leisurely, and with much singing and nonsense among the men, for we are in no hurry now; it is only one day on to Igneh, the first village of Jebel Shammar. The camels, though tired, are not now in any danger of breaking down, and they have capital *nassí* grass to eat; the tufts of grass are beginning to get their new shoots. The Nefûd here is as big as ever, and the fuljes as deep; and we crossed the track of a bakar wahash or wild cow, not an hour before we stopped. At half past three, we came upon a shepherd driving forty sheep to market at Haïl. He is a Shammar from Ibn Rahîs, a sheykh, whose tents we saw to-day a long way off to the north-east, and he intends selling his flock to the Persian pilgrims who are expected at Haïl to-day. The pilgrims, he says, are on their way from Mecca, and will stay a week at Haïl. Who knows if we may not travel on with them? The sheep, which I took at first for goats, are gaunt, long legged creatures, with long silky hair, not wool, growing down to their fetlocks, sleek pendulous ears

and smooth faces. They are jet black with white heads, spots of black round the eyes and noses, which look as if they had been drinking ink. They are as unlike sheep as it is possible to conceive, all legs, and tail, and face. But they have the merit of being able to live on adr for a month at a time without needing water. They are, I fancy, quite peculiar to Nejd. This meeting was the signal for a halt, and behold a delightful little fulj, just big enough to hold us, in the middle of a bed of nassí. We slid our horses down the sand-slope, the camels followed, Mohammed, the while, bargaining with the shepherd for the fattest of his flock. Here we unloaded, and the camels in another ten minutes were scattered all over the hill-side, for there is a sand-hill at least a hundred feet high, close by above us. Ibrahim, the short, was set to watch them while the rest were busy with the camp. There is an enormous supply of fire-wood, beautiful white logs which burn like match wood. We climbed to the top of the hill to take the bearings of the country, for there is a splendid view now of Jebel Shammar, no isolated peak, as Dr. Colvill would have it last year, but a long range of fantastic mountains, stretching far away east and west, reminding one somewhat of the Sierra Guadarama in Spain. There are also several outlying peaks distinct from the main chain. Behind us, to the north-west, the Jobba group, with continuations to the west and south-west. Eastwards, there is a single point,

Jebel Atwa. Haïl lies nearly south-east, its position marked by an abrupt cliff near the eastern extremity of the Jebel Aja range. The northern horizon only is unbroken. This done, we both went down to measure a fulj half a mile off, and found it two hundred and seventy feet deep, with hard ground below. It is marked very regularly on its steep side with sheep tracks, showing how permanent the surface of the Nefûd remains, for the little paths are evidently of old date.* By the time of our return, Hanna's good coffee was ready with a dish of flour and curry, to stay hunger until the sheep is boiled. Awwad, who delights in butcher's work, has killed the sheep in the middle of our camp, for it is the custom to slaughter at the tent door, and has been smearing the camels with gore. When asked why, he says, "it will look as if we had been invited to a feast. It always looks well to have one's camels sprinkled." He has rigged up three tent poles, as a stand to hang the sheep from, and is dismembering in a truly artistic fashion. Ibrahim el-tawîl and Abdallah are collecting an immense pile of wood for the night. Hanna is preparing to cook. Poor Hanna has been having a hard time of it since Meskakeh, for now that everybody has to walk, he insists upon walking too, "to prevent trouble," he says, and probably he is right. A regular Aleppin Christian like

* Query.—May not these be the spiral markings noticed by Mr. Palgrave, and attributed by him to the wind, in his description of a certain maelstrom in the Nefûd?

Hanna, in such a country as this, does best by effacing himself and disarming envy, unless indeed he can fraternize, and at the same time inspire respect, as Ibrahim seems to have done. Hanna is patient, and does not complain, endeavouring, though with a rueful countenance, to be cheerful when the rest tease him. I do my best to protect him, but he dares not take his own part. Lastly, Mohammed is sitting darning his shirt, against making his appearance at Court, and talking to two Jobbites, who are travelling with us, about the virtues of Ibn Rashid, and the grandeur of the Ibn Arûks. The Ibn Arûk legend, like a snowball, is gathering as it rolls, and we fully expect Mohammed to appear in the character of a Prince at Haïl. He talks already of Nejd as his personal property, and affects a certain air of protection towards us, as that of a host doing the honours to his guests. His scare about Ibn Ermal is quite forgotten. Prince or peasant, however, Mohammed has the great merit of always being good-tempered, and this evening he is very amusing. He has been telling us the whole history of his relations with Huseyn Pasha at Deyr. which we never quite understood before (and which I dare not repeat in detail for fear of bringing him into trouble). He has been two or three times in prison, but poor Huseyn seems to have been made a sad fool of. Mohammed also gave us a full, true, and particular account of Ahmed Beg Moali's death; and then we had a long discussion about the exact

form in which we are to introduce ourselves at Haïl. Mohammed will have it that Wilfrid ought to represent himself as a merchant travelling to Bussorah to recover a debt, but this we will not listen to. We think it much more agreeable and quite as prudent to be straightforward, and we intend to tell Ibn Rashid that we are persons of distinction in search of other persons of distinction; that we have already made acquaintance with Ibn Smeyr and Ibn Shaalan, and all the sheykhs of the north, and that each time we have seen a great man, we have been told that these were nothing in point of splendour to the Emir of Haïl, and that hearing this, and being on our way to Bussorah, we have crossed the Nefûd to visit him, as in former days people went to see Suliman ibn Daoud, and then we are to produce our presents and wish him a long life. Mohammed has been obliged to admit that this will be a better plan; and so it is settled. Raḍi, whom we have taken more or less into our confidence, thinks that the Emir will be pleased, and promises to sing our praises "below stairs," and he talks of a Franji having already been at Haïl, and having gone away with money and clothes from Ibn Rashid. Who this can be, we cannot imagine, for Mr. Palgrave was not known there as a European. So we whiled away the time till dinner was ready, and when all had well feasted, Mohammed came to invite us to the servants' fire, where feats of strength were going on. First,

Abdallah lies flat on the sand, a camel saddle is put upon his back, and then two gigantic khurjes, weighing each of them about a hundredweight. With these he struggles to his knees, and then by a prodigious effort to his feet, staggers a pace, and topples over. Mohammed, not to be outdone, lifts Ibrahim kasír, who weighs at least twelve stone, on the palm of his hand off his legs!" Then they make wheels, such as are seen at a circus, and play at a sort of leap-frog, which consists of standing in a row one close behind the other, when the last jumps on their shoulders and runs along till he comes to the end, where he has to turn a somersault and alight as he can on his head or his heels. This is very amusing, and in the deep sand hurts nobody. All, except Hanna, join in these athletic sports, but Awwad, who is a Bedouin born, goes through the performance with a rather wry face. Bedouins never play at games as the town Arabs do, and they have not the physical strength of the others. Awwad revenges himself, however, by malignantly hiding bits of hot coal in the ground, and every now and then somebody steps on these traps with his bare feet, and there is a scream. Great amusement, too, is caused by Wilfrid showing them the old game of turning three times round with the head resting on a short stick, and then trying to walk straight. This is considered very funny, and they generally manage to tumble over Hanna, and when they make him try it, arrange that he shall run into the fire. The best

game, to my mind, is something like one sometimes played by sailors on board ship. They all put their cloaks together in one heap, and one man has to guard it. Then the rest dance round him, and try to steal the clothes away without getting touched. Ibrahim tawîl is great at this sport, and defends the heap with his huge hands and feet, dealing tremendous blows on the unwary, and paying off, I fancy, not a few old scores. Abdallah especially, who is disliked by the rest on account of his bad temper, gets shot clean off his legs by a straight kick almost like a football, and a fight very nearly ensues. But a diversion is made by the ingenious Awwad, who steals away with a gun and fires it suddenly from the top of the fulj, and then comes tumbling head over heels down the sand to represent a ghazú. So the evening passes, and as we go back to our private lair, we see for the first time the zodiacal light in the western sky."

This was our last night in the Nefûd, and the recollection of it long stood as our standard of happiness, when imprisoned within walls at Haïl, or travelling in less congenial lands. The next day we reached Igneh, the first village of Jebel Shammar, and the day after the mountains themselves, the "Happy Mountains," which had so long been the goal of our Pilgrim's progress.

January 23.—It is like a dream to be sitting here, writing a journal on a rock in Jebel Shammar. When I remember how, years ago, I read that romantic

account by Mr. Palgrave, which nobody believed, of an ideal State in the heart of Arabia, and a happy land which nobody but he had seen, and how impossibly remote and unreal it all appeared; and how, later during our travels, we heard of Nejd and Haïl and this very Jebel Shammar, spoken of with a kind of awe by all who knew the name, even by the Bedouins, from the day when at Aleppo Mr. S. first answered our vague questions about it by saying, "It is *possible* to go there. Why do *you* not go?" I feel that we have achieved something which it is not given to every one to do. Wilfrid declares that he shall die happy now, even if we have our heads cut off at Haïl. It is with him a favourite maxim, that every place is exactly like every other place, but Jebel Shammar is not like anything else, at least that I have seen in this world, unless it be Mount Sinaï, and it is more beautiful than that. All our journey to-day has been a romance. We passed through Igneh in the early morning, stopping only to water our animals. It is a pretty little village, something like Jobba, on the edge of the sand, but it has what Jobba has not, square fields of green barley unwalled outside it. These are of course due to irrigation, which while waiting we saw at work from a large well, but they give it a more agricultural look than the walled palm-groves we have hitherto seen. Immediately after Igneh we came upon hard ground, and in our delight indulged our tired mares in a fantasia, which unstiffened their legs and did them good. The soil

was beautifully crisp and firm, being composed of fine ground granite, quite different from the sandstone formation of Jobba and Jôf. The vegetation, too, was changed. The yerta and adr and other Nefûd plants had disappeared, and in their place were shrubs, which I remember having seen in the wadys of Mount Sinaï, with occasionally small trees of the acacia tribe known to pilgrims as the "burning bush" —in Arabic "talkh"—also a plant with thick green leaves and no stalks called "gheyseh," which they say is good for the eyes. Every now and then a solitary boulder, all of red granite, rose out of the plain, or here and there little groups of rounded rocks, out of which we started several hares. The view in front of us was beautiful beyond description, a perfectly even plain, sloping gradually upwards, out of which these rocks and tells cropped up like islands, and beyond it the violet-coloured mountains now close before us, with a precipitous cliff which has been our landmark for several days towering over all. The outline of Jebel Shammar is strangely fantastic, running up into spires and domes and pinnacles, with here and there a loop-hole through which you can see the sky, or a wonderful boulder perched like a rocking stone on the sky line. One rock was in shape just like a camel, and would deceive any person who did not know that a camel could not have climbed up there. At half-past one we passed the first detached masses of rock which stand like forts outside a citadel, and, bearing away gradually

to the left, reached the buttresses of the main body of hills. These all rise abruptly from the smooth sloping surface of the plain, and, unlike the mountains of most countries, with no interval of broken ground. Mount Sinaï is the only mountain I have seen like this. In both cases you can stand on a plain, and touch the mountain with your hand. Only at intervals from clefts in the hills little wadys issue, showing that it sometimes rains in Jebel Shammar. Indeed to-night, we shall probably have a proof of this, for a great black cloud is rising behind the peaks westwards, and every now and then it thunders. All is tight and secure in our tent against rain. There is a small ravine in the rock close to where we are encamped, with a deep natural tank full of the clearest water. We should never have discovered it but for the shepherd who came on with us to-day, for it is hidden away under some gigantic granite boulders, and to get at it you have to creep through a hole in the rock. A number of bright green plants grow in among the crevices (capers ?), and we have seen a pair of partridges, little dove-coloured birds with yellow bills.

We passed a small party of Bedouin Shammar, moving camp to-day. One of them had a young goshawk* on his delúl. They had no horses with them, and we have not crossed the track of a horse since leaving Shakik. I forgot to say that yesterday we saw a Harb Bedouin, an ugly little black

* More probably a lanner.

faced man, who told us he was keeping sheep for the Emir. The Harb are the tribe which hold the neighbourhood of Medina, and have such an evil reputation among pilgrims.

January 24.—Thunderstorm in the night. We sent on Raḍi early this morning, for we had only a few miles to go, with our letters to Haïl. It was a lovely morning after the rain, birds singing sweetly from the bushes, but we all felt anxious. Even Mohammed was silent and preoccupied, for none knew now what any moment might bring forth. We put on our best clothes, however, and tried to make our mares look smart. We had expected to find Haïl the other side of the hills, but this was a mistake. Instead of crossing them, we kept along their edge, turning gradually round to the right, the ground still rising. The barometer at the camp was 3370, and now it marks an ascent of two hundred feet.

We passed two villages about a mile away to our left, El Akeyt and El Uta; and from one of them we were joined by some peasants riding in to Haïl on donkeys. This looked more like civilisation than anything we had seen since leaving Syria. We were beginning to get rather nervous about the result of our message, when Raḍi appeared and announced that the Emir had read our letters, and would be delighted to see us. He had ordered two houses to be made ready for us, and nothing more remained for us to do, than to ride into the town, and present ourselves at the kasr. It was not far off, for on coming to the

top of the low ridge which had been in front of us for some time, we suddenly saw Haïl at our feet not half a mile distant. The town is not particularly imposing, most of the houses being hidden in palm groves, and the wall surrounding it little more than ten feet high. The only important building visible, was a large castle close to the entrance, and this Raḍi told us was the kasr, Ibn Rashid's palace.

In spite of preoccupations, I shall never forget the vivid impression made on me, as we entered the town, by the extraordinary spick and span neatness of the walls and streets, giving almost an air of unreality.

RECEPTION AT HAÏL.

CHAPTER X.

"There's daggers in men's smiles."—SHAKESPEARE.

Haïl—The Emir Mohammed Ibn Rashid—His menagerie—His horses—His courtiers—His wives—Amusements of the ladies of Haïl—Their domestic life—An evening at the castle—The telephone.

As we stayed some time at Haïl, I will not give the detail of every day. It would be tedious, and would involve endless repetitions, and not a few corrections, for it was only by degrees that we learned to understand all we saw and all we heard.

Our reception was everything that we could have wished. As we rode into the courtyard of the kasr, we were met by some twenty well-dressed men, each one of whom made a handsomer appearance than any Arabs we had previously seen in our lives. "The sons of Sheykhs," whispered Mohammed, who was rather pale, and evidently much impressed by the solemnity of the occasion. In their midst stood a magnificent old man, clothed in scarlet, whose tall figure and snow-white beard gave us a notion of what Solomon might have been in all his glory. He carried a long wand in his hand—it looked like a sceptre—and came solemnly forward to greet us. "The Emir," whispered Mo-

hammed, as we all alighted. Wilfrid then gave the usual "salam aleykum," to which every one replied "aleykum salam," in a loud cheerful tone, with a cordiality of manner that was very reassuring. I thought I had never seen so many agreeable faces collected together, or people with so excellent a demeanour. The old man, smiling, motioned to us to enter, and others led the way. We were then informed that these were the servants of the Emir, and the old man his chamberlain. They showed us first through a dark tortuous entrance, constructed evidently for purposes of defence, and then down a dark corridor, one side of which was composed of pillars, reminding one a little of the entrance to some ancient Egyptian temple. Then one of the servants tapped at a low door, and exchanged signals with somebody else inside, and the door was opened, and we found ourselves in a large kahwah, or reception room. It was handsome from its size, seventy feet by thirty, and from the row of five pillars, which stood in the middle, supporting the roof. The columns were about four feet in diameter, and were quite plain, with square capitals, on which the ends of the rafters rested. The room was lighted by small square air-holes near the roof, and by the door, which was now left open. The whole of the inside was white, or rather, brown-washed, and there was no furniture of any sort, or fittings, except wooden pegs for hanging swords to, a raised platform opposite the door where the

THE EMIR'S PALACE AT HAÏL.

[*Vol. I., p.* 214.

mortar stood for coffee-pounding, and a square hearth in one corner, where a fire was burning. It was very dark, but we could make out some slaves, busy with coffee-pots round the fire. Close to this we were invited to sit down, and then an immense number of polite speeches were exchanged, our healths being asked after at least twenty times, and always with some mention of the name of God, for this is required by politeness in Nejd. Coffee was soon served, and after this the conversation became general between our servants and the servants of the Emir, and then there was a stir, and a general rising, and the word was passed round, "yiji el Emir," the Emir is coming. We, too, got up, and this time it really was the Emir. He came in at the head of a group of still more smartly-dressed people than those we had seen before, and held out his hand to Wilfrid, to me, and to Mohammed, exchanging salutations with each of us in turn, and smiling graciously. Then we all sat down, and Wilfrid made a short speech of the sort we had already agreed upon, which the Emir answered very amiably, saying that he was much pleased to see us, and that he hoped we should make his house our house. He then asked Mohammed for news of the road; of Jóhar and Meskakeh, and especially about the war going on between Sotamm and Ibn Smeyr. So far so good, and it was plain that we had nothing now to fear; yet I could not help looking now and then at those

pegs on the wall, and thinking of the story of the young Ibn Jabars and their slaves, who had been so treacherously murdered in this very hall, and by this very man, our host.

The Emir's face is a strange one. It may be mere fancy, prompted by our knowledge of Ibn Rashid's past life, but his countenance recalled to us the portraits of Richard the Third, lean, sallow cheeks, much sunken, thin lips, with an expression of pain, except when smiling, a thin black beard, well defined black knitted eyebrows, and remarkable eyes,—eyes deep sunk and piercing, like the eyes of a hawk, but ever turning restlessly from one of our faces to the other, and then to those beside him. It was the very type of a conscience-stricken face, or of one which fears an assassin. His hands, too, were long and claw-like, and never quiet for an instant, incessantly playing, while he talked, with his beads, or with the hem of his abba. With all this, the Emir is very distinguished in appearance, with a tall figure, and, clothed as he was in purple and fine linen, he looked every inch a king. His dress was magnificent; at first we fancied it put on only in our honour, but this we found to be a mistake, and Ibn Rashid never wears anything less gorgeous. His costume consisted of several jibbehs of brocaded Indian silk, a black abba, interwoven with gold, and at least three kefiyehs, one over the other, of the kind made at Bagdad. His aghal, also, was of the Bagdad type, which I had hitherto

supposed were only worn by women, bound up with silk and gold thread, and set high on the forehead, so as to look like a crown. In the way of arms he wore several golden-hilted daggers and a handsome golden-hilted sword, ornamented with turquoises and rubies, Haïl work, as we afterwards found. His immediate attendants, though less splendid, were also magnificently clothed.

After about a quarter of an hour's conversation, Mohammed ibn Rashid rose and went out, and we were then shown upstairs by ourselves to a corridor, where dates and bread and butter were served to us. Then a message came from the Emir, begging that we would attend his *mejlis*, the court of justice which he holds daily in the yard of the palace. We were not at all prepared for this, and when the castle gate was opened, and we were ushered out into the sunshine, we were quite dazzled by the spectacle which met our eyes.

The courtyard, which is about a hundred yards long by fifty broad, was completely lined with soldiers, not soldiers such as we are accustomed to in Europe, but still soldiers. They were, to a certain extent, in uniform, that is to say, they all wore brown cloaks and blue or red kefiyehs on their heads. Each, moreover, carried a silver-hilted sword. I counted up to eight hundred of them forming the square, and they were sitting in a double row under the walls, one row on a sort of raised bench, which runs round the yard, and the

other squatted on the ground in front of them. The Emir had a raised seat under the main wall, and he was surrounded by his friends, notably his cousin Hamúd, who attends him everywhere, and his favourite slave, Mubarek, whose duty it is to guard him constantly from assassins.* In front of the Emir stood half-a-dozen suppliants, and outside the square of soldiers, a mob of citizens and pilgrims, for the pilgrimage had arrived at Haïl. We had to walk across the square escorted by a slave, and the Emir motioned us to take places at his side, which we accordingly did; he then went on with his work. People came with petitions, which were read to him by Hamúd, and to which he generally put his seal without discussion, and then there was a quarrel to settle, the rights of which I confess I did not understand, for the Arabic spoken at Haïl is different from any we had hitherto heard. I noticed, however, that though the courtiers addressed Mohammed as Emir, the poorer people, probably Bedouins, called him "ya Sheykh," or simply "ya Mohammed." One, who was probably a small Shammar Sheykh, he kissed on the cheek. Some pilgrims, who had a grievance, also presented themselves, and had their case very summarily decided; they were then turned out by the soldiers. No case occupied more than three minutes,

* The danger to Mohammed is a personal one on account of the blood he has shed, not an official one, for, as Emir, he is adored by his subjects.

and the whole thing was over in half-an-hour. At last the Emir rose, bowed to us, and went into the palace, while we, very glad to stretch our legs, which were cramped with squatting on the bench barely a foot wide, were escorted to our lodgings by the chamberlain and two of the soldiers.

We found a double house provided for us in the main street of Haïl, and not two hundred yards from the kasr—a house without pretence, but sufficient for our wants, and secure from all intruders, for the street door could be locked, and the walls were high. It consisted of two separate houses, as I believe most dwellings in Arabia do, one for men and the other for women. In the former there was a kahwah and a couple of smaller rooms, and this we gave over to Mohammed and the servants, keeping the *harim* for ourselves. This last had a small open court, just large enough for the three mares to stand in, an open vestibule of the sort they call *liwan* at Damascus, and two little dens. In one of these dens we stored our luggage, and in the other, spread our beds. The doors of these inner rooms could be locked up when we went out, with curious wooden locks and wooden keys; the doors were of ithel wood. All was exceedingly simple, but in decent repair and clean, the only ornaments being certain patterns, scratched out in white from the brown wash which covered the walls. Here we soon made ourselves comfortable, and were not sorry to rest at last, after our long journey.

Our rest, however, was not to come yet. It was only one o'clock when we arrived at our house, and before two, the Emir sent for us again. This time the reception was a private one in the upper rooms of the kasr, and we found the Emir alone with Hamúd. He received us with even more cordiality than before, and with less ceremony. We had brought presents with us, the duty of displaying which we left to Mohammed, who expatiated on their value and nature with all the art of a bazaar merchant. As for us, we were a little ashamed of their insignificance, for we had had no conception of Ibn Rashid's true position when we left Damascus, and the scarlet cloth jíbbeh we had considered the *ne plus ultra* of splendour for him, looked shabby among the gorgeous dresses worn at Haïl. We had added to the cloak and other clothes, which are the usual gifts of ceremony, a revolver in a handsome embroidered case, a good telescope, and a Winchester rifle, any one of which would have made Jedaan or Ibn Shaalan open his eyes with pleasure; but Ibn Rashid, though far too well-bred not to admire and approve, cared evidently little for these things, having seen them all before. Even the rifle was no novelty, for he had an exactly similar one in his armoury. Poor Mohammed, however, went on quite naïvely with his descriptions, while the Emir looked out of window through the telescope, pretending to be examining the wall opposite, for there was no view. Hamúd, his cousin,

whose acquaintance we now made, is more *sympathique* than the Emir, though they are ridiculously like each other in face, but Hamúd has the advantage of a good conscience, and has no vengeance to fear. They were dressed also alike, so that it was difficult at first to know them apart; perhaps there is a motive in this, as with the Richmonds of Shakespeare. The Emir's room was on the same plan as the kahwah, but smaller, and boasting only two columns, the coffee place in the right-hand corner as you enter, and the Emir's fireplace, with a fire burning in it, on an iron plate in front. Persian carpets were spread, and there were plenty of cushions to lean against by the wall. We were invited to sit down to the left of the Emir and Hamúd, who never seems to leave his side. Mohammed had a place on the right, between them and the door. Coffee, and a very sweet tea, were handed round in thimblefuls, and a good deal of conversation ensued. We had brought a letter from our old friend the Nawab Ikbal ed-Dowlah, who had been at Haïl about forty years ago, in the time of Abdallah ibn Rashid.* The Emir remembered his coming, though he must have been a child at the time, and said some pretty things in compliment of him. He then asked Mohammed about his Arûk relations in Jôf, and said that they had

* The Nawab was in fact detained a prisoner at Haïl for about two months. But this we did not at the time know; nor was any allusion made by Ibn Rashid to the circumstance.

always been faithful to him. They had taken the Emir's part, it would seem, in some revolt which took place there a few years ago. There was also an Ibn Arûk in Harîk, a Bedouin sheykh, who the Emir said was a friend of his; at least, he was on bad terms with Ibn Saoud and the Wahhabis, and this is a title to favour at Haïl. Ibn Rashid is very jealous of Ibn Shoud, and now that the Wahhabi empire is broken up, fosters any discontent there may be in Aared. I believe many of the Bedouin sheykhs of Upper Nejd have come over to him. Mohammed, thus encouraged, launched out into his favourite tales, and repeated the Ibn Arûk legend, which, I confess, I am beginning to get a little tired of, and then went on to describe the wonders of Tudmur, of which he now implied, without exactly stating it in words, that he was actual Sheykh. The house he lived in at home, he said, had columns of marble, each sixty feet in height, and had been built originally by Suliman ibn Daoud. There were two hundred of these columns in and around it, and the walls were twenty feet thick. The Emir, who seemed rather perplexed by this, appealed to us for confirmation, and we told him that all this really existed at Tudmur; indeed, there was no gainsaying the fact that Mohammed's father's house had some of the objects named on the premises, though the house itself is but a little square box of mud. The city wall, in fact, makes one side of the stable, and a column or two have been

worked into the modern building; but this we did not think it necessary to explain. Mohammed's reputation rose in consequence, and I already began to fear that the Emir's civilities had turned his head. I heard him whisper to Hamúd that the silver-hilted sword he is wearing, and which is the one Wilfrid gave him at Damascus, was an ancestral relic; it had been, he said, "min zeman," from time immemorial, in the Arûk family. He had also established a fiction, in which he privately entreated us to join, that we started from home with a hawk (for all the best falcons come from Tudmur), and lost it on the journey.*

While we were discussing these important matters, the call to prayer was heard, and the two Ibn Rashids, begging us to remain seated, rose and went out.

They were absent a few minutes, and on their return the Emir, to our great delight, proposed to show us his gardens, and immediately led the way down tortuous passages and through courts and doors into a palm grove surrounded by a high wall. Here we were joined by numerous slaves, some black, some white, for there are both sorts at Haïl. A number of gazelles were running about, and came up quite familiarly as we entered. These were of two varieties, one browner than the other, answering, I believe, to what are called the "gazelle des

* To travel with a hawk is a sign of nobility.

'bois," and the "gazelle des plaines," in Algeria. There were also a couple of ibexes with immense heads, tame like the gazelles, and allowing themselves to be stroked. The gazelles seemed especially at home, and we were told that they breed here in captivity. The most interesting, however, of all the animals in this garden were three of the wild cows (bakar wahhash), from the Nefûd, which we had so much wished to see. They proved to be, as we had supposed, a kind of antelope,* though their likeness to cows was quite close enough to account for their name. They stood about as high as an Alderney calf six months old, and had humps on their shoulders like the Indian cattle. In colour they were a yellowish white, with reddish legs turning to black towards the feet. The face was parti-coloured, and the horns, which were black, were quite straight and slanted backwards, and fully three feet long, with spiral markings. These wild cows were less tame than the rest of the animals, and the slaves were rather afraid of them, for they seemed ready to use their horns, which were as sharp as needles. The animals, though fat, evidently suffered from confinement, for all were lame, one with an enlarged knee, and the rest with overgrown hoofs. When we had seen and admired the menagerie, and fed the antelopes with dates, we went on through a low door, which we had almost to creep through, into another garden, where there were

* Oryx beatrix.

lemon trees (treng), bitter oranges (hámud), and pomegranates (roman). The Emir, who was very polite and attentive to me, had some of the fruit picked and gave me a bunch of a kind of thyme, the only flower growing there. We saw some camels at work drawing water from a large well, a hundred to a hundred and fifty feet deep, to judge by the rope. The Emir then crept through another low door and we after him, and then to our great satisfaction we found ourselves in a stable-yard full of mares, tethered in rows each to a manger. I was almost too excited to look, for it was principally to see these that we had come so far.

This yard contained about twenty mares, and beyond it was another with a nearly equal number. Then there was a third with eight horses, tethered in like manner; and beyond it again a fourth with thirty or forty foals. I will not now describe all we saw, for the Emir's stud will require a chapter to itself. Suffice it to say, that Wilfrid's first impression and mine were alike. The animals we saw before us were not comparable for beauty of form or for quality with the best we had seen among the Gomussa. The Emir, however, gave us little time for reflection, for with a magnificent wave of his hand, and explaining with mock humility, "The horses of my slaves," he dragged us on from one yard to another, allowing us barely time to ask a few questions as to breed, for the answers to which he referred us to Hamúd. We had seen enough, how-

ever, to make us very happy, and Hamúd had promised that we should see them again. There was no doubt whatever that, in spite of the Emir's disclaimer, these were Ibn Rashid's celebrated mares, the representatives of that stud of Feysul ibn Saoud, about which such a romance had been made.

An equally interesting spectacle, the Emir thought for us, was his kitchen, to which he now showed the way. Here, with unconcealed pride, he displayed his pots and pans, especially seven monstrous cauldrons, capable each, he declared, of boiling three whole camels. Several of them were actually at work, for Ibn Rashid entertains nearly two hundred guests daily, besides his own household. Forty sheep or seven camels are his daily bill of fare. As we came out, we found the hungry multitude already assembling. Every stranger in Haïl has his place at Ibn Rashid's table, and towards sunset the courtyard begins to fill. The Emir does not himself preside at these feasts. He always dines alone, or in his harim; but the slaves and attendants are extraordinarily well-drilled, and behave with perfect civility to all comers, rich and poor alike. Our own dinner was brought to us at our house. Thus ended our first day at Haïl, a day of wonderful interest, but not a little fatiguing. "Ya akhi," (oh my brother), said Mohammed ibn Arûk to Wilfrid that evening, as they sat smoking and drinking their coffee, "did I not promise you that you should see Nejd, and Ibn Rashid, and the mares

of Haïl, and have you not seen them?" We both thanked him, and, indeed, we both felt very grateful. Not that the favours were all on one side; for brotherly offices had been very evenly balanced, and Mohammed had been quite as eager to make this journey as we had. But, alas! our pleasant intercourse with Mohammed was very near its end.

The next few days of our life at Haïl may be briefly described. Wilfrid and Mohammed went every morning to the mejlis, and then paid visits, sometimes to Hamúd, sometimes to Mubarek, sometimes to the Emir. A slave brought us our breakfast daily from the kasr, and a soldier came to escort us through the streets. Mohammed had now made acquaintances of his own, and was generally out all day long. I stayed very much in doors, and avoided passing through the streets, except when invited to come to the castle, for we had agreed that discretion was the better part of valour with us. That there was some reason for this prudence I think probable, for though we never experienced anything but politeness from the Haïl people, we heard afterwards that some among them were not best pleased at the reception given us by the Emir. Europeans had never before been seen in Nejd; and it is possible that a fanatical feeling might have arisen if we had done anything to excite it. Wahhabism is on the decline, but not yet extinct at Haïl; and the Wahhabis would of course have been our enemies. In the Emir's house, or even under

charge of one of his officers, we were perfectly safe, but wandering about alone would have been rash. The object, too, would have been insufficient, for away from the Court there is little to see at Haïl.

With Hamúd and his family we made great friends. He was a man who at once inspired confidence, and we had no cause to regret having acted on our first impression of his character. He has always, they say, refused to take presents from the Emir; and has never approved of his conduct, though he has sided with him politically, and serves him faithfully as a brother. His manners are certainly as distinguished as can be found anywhere in the world, and he is besides intelligent and well informed. The Emir is different; with him there was always a certain *gêne*. It was impossible to forget the horrible story of his usurpation; and there was something, too, about him which made it impossible to feel quite at ease in his presence. Though he knows how to behave with dignity, he does not always do so. It is difficult to reconcile his almost childish manner, at times, with the ability he has given proofs of. He has something of the spoiled child in his way of wandering on from one subject to another; and, like Jóhar, of asking questions which he does not always wait to hear answered, a piece of ill-manners not altogether unroyal, and so, perhaps, the effect of his condition as a sovereign prince. He is also very naïvely

vain, as most people become who are fed constantly on flattery; and he is continually on the look-out for compliments about his power, and his wisdom, and his possessions. His jealousy of other great Sheykhs whom we have seen is often childishly displayed. Hamúd has none of this. I fancy he stands to his cousin Mohammed somewhat in the position in which Morny is supposed to have stood to Louis Napoleon, only that Morny was neither so good a man nor even so fine a gentleman as Hamúd. He gives the Emir advice, and in private speaks his mind, only appearing to the outer world as the obsequious follower of his prince. Hamúd has several sons, the eldest of whom, Majid, has all his father's charm of manner, and has, besides, the attraction of perfectly candid youth, and a quite ideal beauty. He is about sixteen, and he and his brother and a young uncle came to see us the morning after our arrival, sent by their father to pay their compliments. He talked very much and openly about everything, and gave us a quantity of information about the various mares at the Emir's stable, and about his father's mares and his own. He then went on to tell us of an expedition he had made with the Emir to the neighbourhood of Queyt, and of how he had seen the sea. They had made a ghazú on the felláhín of the sea-coast, and had then returned. He asked me how I rode on horseback, and I showed him my side-saddle, which, however, did not surprise him. "It is a shedad," he said;

"you ride as one rides a delúl." This young Majid, though he looks quite a boy, is married; and we were informed that here no one of good family puts off marriage after the age of sixteen. I made acquaintance with his wife Urgheyeh, who is very pretty, very small in stature, and very young; she is one of Metaab's daughters, and her sister is married to Hamúd, so that father and son are brothers-in-law.

Mubarek, the Emir's chief slave, was one of our particular acquaintances. He inhabits a very handsome house, as houses go in Haïl; and there Wilfrid paid him more than one visit. His house is curiously decorated with designs in plaster of birds and beasts—ostriches, antelopes, and camels. Though a slave, Mubarek has not in appearance the least trace of negro blood; and it is still a mystery to us how he happens to be one. He is a well-bred person, and has done everything in his power to make things pleasant for us.

On the second day after our arrival, after the usual compliments and some conversation, I asked the Emir's permission to pay a visit to the harim. Mohammed ibn Rashid appeared gratified by my request, which he immediately granted, saying that he would send to the khawatin (ladies) to inform them, and desire them to prepare for my reception. He accordingly despatched a messenger, but we sat on talking for a long time before anything came of the message; I had grown quite tired of waiting,

and was already wondering how soon we should be at liberty to return home, where I might write my journal in secret, when the servant re-appeared, and brought us word that Amusheh, the Emir's chief wife, was ready to receive me. I fancy that ladies here seldom dress with any care unless they want to display their silks and jewels to some visitor; and on such special occasions their toilet is a most elaborate one, with kohl and fresh paint, and takes a long time. The Emir at once put me in charge of a black slave woman, who led the way to the harim. Hamúd's wives as well as Mohammed's live in the palace, but in separate dwellings. The kasr is almost a town in itself, and I and my black guide walked swiftly through so many alleys and courts, and turned so many corners to the right and to the left, that if I had been asked to find my way back unassisted, I certainly could not have done it. At last, however, after crossing a very large courtyard, we stopped at a small low door. This was open, and through it I could see a number of people sitting round a fire within, for it was the entrance to Amusheh's kahwah. This room had two columns supporting the ceiling, like all other rooms I had seen in the palace, except the great kahwah, which has five. The fire-place, as usual, an oblong hole in the ground, was on the left as one entered, in the corner near the door; in it stood a brazier containing the fire, and between it and the wall handsome çarpets had been spread. All the persons present

rose to their feet as I arrived. Amusheh could easily be singled out from among the crowd, even before she advanced to do the honours. She possesses a certain distinction of appearance and manner which would be recognised anywhere, and completely eclipsed the rest of the company. But she, the daughter of Obeyd and sister of Hamúd, has every right to outshine friends, relatives, and fellow wives. Her face, though altogether less regularly shaped than her brother's, is sufficiently good-looking, with a well-cut nose and mouth, and something singularly sparkling and brilliant. Hedusheh and Lulya, the two next wives, who were present, had gold brocade as rich as hers, and lips and cheeks smeared as red as hers with carmine, and eyes with borders kohled as black as hers, but lacked her charm. Amusheh is besides clever and amusing, and managed to keep up a continual flow of conversation, in which the other two hardly ventured to join. They sat looking pretty and agreeable, but were evidently kept in a subordinate position. Lulya shares with Amusheh, as the latter informed me, what they consider the great privilege of never leaving town, thus taking precedence of Hedusheh, on whom devolves the duty of following the Emir's fortunes in the desert, where he always spends a part of the year in tents. The obligation of such foreign service is accounted derogatory, and accordingly objected to by these Haïl ladies. They have no idea of amusement, if I may judge from what they said to me,

but a firm conviction that perfect happiness and dignity consist in sitting still.

This happiness Amusheh and I enjoyed for some time. We sat together on one carpet spread over a mattress, cushions being ranged along the wall behind us for us to lean against, and the fire in front scorching our faces while we talked. On my right sat Hedusheh; beyond her Lulya and the rest of the company, making a circle round the fireplace. Before long, Atwa, a pretty little girl, who was introduced to me as the fourth wife, came in and took her place beyond Lulya. She looked more like a future wife than one actually married, being very young; and indeed it presently appeared that she had merely been brought to be looked at and considered about, and that the Emir had decided to reject her as too childish and insignificant.* He was, in fact, casting about in his mind for some suitable alliance which should bring him political support, as well as an increase of domestic comfort. That these were the objects of his new matrimonial projects I soon learned from his own mouth, from the questions he asked me about the marriageable daughters of Bedouin Sheyks. What could, indeed, be more suitable for his purpose than some daughter of a great desert sheykh, whose family should be valuable allies in war, while she herself, the ideal fourth wife, unlike these ladies of the town, should be

* I heard nothing of the fate of Obeyd's widow, and could not inquire.

always ready to accompany her husband to the desert, and should indeed prefer the desert to the town?

Among other persons present were several oldish women, relatives, whose names and exact relationship have slipped my memory; also a few friends and a vast number of attendants and slaves, these last mostly black. They all squatted round the fire, each trying to get into the front rank, and to seize every opportunity of wedging in a remark, by way of joining in the conversation of their betters. None of these outsiders were otherwise than plainly dressed in the dark blue or black cotton or woollen stuffs, used by ordinary Bedouin women in this part of Arabia, often bordered with a very narrow red edge, like a cord or binding, which looks well. The rich clothes worn by Amusheh and her companion wives are somewhat difficult to describe, presenting as they did an appearance of splendid shapelessness. Each lady had a garment cut like an abba, but closed up the front, so that it must have been put on over the head; and as it was worn without any belt or fastening at the waist, it had the effect of a sack. These sacks or bags were of magnificent material, gold interwoven with silk, but neither convenient nor becoming, effectually hiding any grace of figure. Amusheh wore crimson and gold, and round her neck a mass of gold chains studded with turquoises and pearls. Her hair hung down in four long plaits, plastered smooth with some

reddish stuff, and on the top of her head stuck a gold and turquoise ornament, like a small plate, about four inches in diameter. This was placed forward at the edge of the forehead, and fastened back with gold and pearl chains to another ornament resembling a lappet, also of gold and turquoise, hooked on behind the head, and having flaps which fell on each side of the head and neck, ending in long strings of pearls with bell-shaped gold and pearl tassels. The pearls were all irregularly shaped and unsorted as to size, the turquoises very unequal in shape, size, and quality, the coral generally in beads. The gold work was mostly good, some of it said to be from Persia, but the greater part of Haïl workmanship. I had nearly forgotten to mention the nose-ring, here much larger than I have seen it at Bagdad and elsewhere, measuring an inch and a half to two inches across. It consists of a thin circle of gold, with a knot of gold and turquoises attached by a chain to the cap or lappet before described. It is worn in the left nostril, but taken out and left dangling while the wearer eats and drinks. A most inconvenient ornament, I thought and said, and when removed it leaves an unsightly hole, badly pierced, in the nostril, and more uncomfortable-looking than the holes in European ears. But fashion rules the ladies at Haïl as in other places, and my new acquaintances only laughed at such criticisms. They find these trinkets useful toys, and amuse themselves while

talking by continually pulling them out and putting them in again. The larger size of ring seemed besides to be a mark of high position, so that the diameter of the circle might be considered the measure of the owner's rank, for the rings of all inferiors were kept within the inch.

Amusheh was very communicative, but told me so many new names, that I could not remember all the information she volunteered about the Ibn Rashid family and relationships. She remarked that neither she nor any of Mohammed's wives had any children, a fact which I already knew, and not from Radi alone; for it is the talk of the town and tribe that this is a judgment for the Emir's crimes. She spoke with great affection of her nephew Majid and of her brother Hamúd, and with veneration of her father Obeyd, but I cannot recollect that she told me anything new about any of them. She spoke too of Tellál, but of course made no mention of Bender. Indeed, anxious as I was for any information she might give, I knew too much of the family history and secrets to venture on asking many questions; besides, any show of curiosity might have made her suspect me of some unavowed motive. I therefore felt more at ease when the conversation wandered from dangerous topics to safe and trivial ones, such as the manners and customs of different countries. "Why do you not wear your hair like mine?" said she, holding out one of her long auburn plaits for me to admire; and I had

to explain that such short locks as mine were not sufficient for the purpose. "Then why did I not dress in gold brocade?" "How unsuitable," I replied, "would such beautiful stuffs be for the rough work of travelling, hunting, and riding in the desert." When we talked of riding, Amusheh seemed for a moment doubtful whether to be completely satisfied about her own lot in life—she would like, she said, to see me on my mare; and I promised she should, if possible, be gratified; but the opportunity never occurred, and perhaps the supreme authority did not care that it should. Even she might become discontented. Thus conversing, time slipped away, and the midday call to prayer sounded. My hostess then begged me to excuse her, and added, "I wish to pray." She and the rest then got up and went to say their prayers in the middle of the room. After this she returned and continued the conversation where we had left it off.

Some slaves now brought a tray, which they placed before me. On it was a regular solid breakfast: a large dish of rice in the middle, set round with small bowls of various sorts of rich and greasy sauces to be eaten with the rice. I excused myself as well as I could for my want of appetite, and said that I had this very morning eaten one of the hares sent to us by the Emir. Of course I was only exhorted all the more to eat, and obliged to go through the form of trying; but fortunately there were other hungry mouths at hand, and eager eyes

watching till the dishes should be passed on to them, so I got off pretty easily.

Amusheh afterwards invited me to go upstairs, that she might show me her own private apartment, on the floor above the kahwah. I followed her up a steep staircase, of which each step was at least eighteen inches in height. It led nowhere, except to a single room, the same size as the one below, and built in the same way, with two columns supporting the roof, and with a window in a recess corresponding to the door beneath. This apartment was well carpeted, and contained for other furniture a large bed, or couch, composed of a pile of mattresses, with a velvet and gold counterpane spread over it; also a kind of press or cupboard, a box (sanduk) rather clumsily made of dark wood, ornamented by coarse, thin plaques of silver stuck on it here and there. The press stood against the wall, and might be five feet long and two to three feet high, opening with two doors, and raised about two feet from the floor on four thin legs. Underneath and in front of it were three or four rows of china and crockery of a common sort, and a few Indian bowls, all arranged on the carpet like articles for sale in the streets. Amusheh asked what I thought of her house, was it nice? And after satisfying herself of my approbation, she conducted me down again, and we sat as before on the mattress between the brazier and the wall.

During my stay, the Emir paid two visits to the

kahwah, and each time that he appeared at the door the crowd and the wives, except Amusheh, rose and remained standing until he left. Amusheh only made a slight bow or movement, as if about to rise, and kept her place by me while her husband stood opposite to us talking. He addressed himself almost entirely to me, and spoke chiefly in the frivolous, almost puerile, manner he sometimes affects. He inquired my opinion of his wives, whether they were more beautiful and charming than Ibn Shaalan's wife, Ghiowseh, the sister of El Homeydi ibn Meshur, or than his former wife, Turkya, Jedaan's daughter, who had left him and returned to her father's tent. In the forty-eight hours since my arrival at Haïl, the Emir had already asked me many questions about these two ladies, and I now answered for the hundredth time that Turkya was pretty and nice, and that Ghiowseh was still prettier, but very domineering. He was, however, determined on a comparison of the two families, and it was fortunate that now, having seen Amusheh, Hedusheh, and Lulya and Atwa, I could say with truth they were handsomer, even the poor little despised Atwa, than their rivals. He was rather impatient of Atwa being classed with the others, and said, "Oh, Atwa, I don't want her; she is worth nothing." His character is, as I have already said, a strange mixture of remarkable ability and political insight on the one hand, and on the other a tendency to waste time and

thought on the most foolish trifles, if they touch his personal vanity. Of his ability I judge by his extremely interesting remarks on serious subjects, as well as by the position he has been able to seize and to keep. Of his energy no one can doubt, for he has shown it, alas, by his crimes; but he is so eaten up with petty personal jealousies, that I sometimes wonder whether these would influence his conduct at an important political crisis. I think, however, that at such a moment all little vanities would be forgotten, for he is above all things ambitious, and his vanity is, as it were, a part and parcel of his ambition. He is personally jealous of all other renowned chiefs, because here in Arabia personal heroism is, perhaps more than anywhere else in the world since the age of chivalry, an engine of political power. He would, I doubt not, make alliance with Sotamm, if necessary to gain his ends; nevertheless, he could not resist talking to me about Ibn Shaalan at this most inappropriate moment, evidently hoping to hear something disparaging of his rival. I confess I found it embarrassing to undergo an examination as to the merits of Ghiowseh and Turkya in the presence of Mohammed's own wives, who all listened with wide open eyes, breathless with attention. My embarrassment only increased when, after the Emir was gone, Amusheh, on her part, immediately attacked me with a volley of questions. While he remained he had persisted in his inquiries, especially about

Turkya, till I, being driven into a corner, at last lost patience, and exclaimed, "But why do you ask me these questions? Why do you want to hear about Turkya? What is it to you whether she is fair or kind? You never have seen her, nor is it likely you ever will see her!" "No," he replied, "I have never seen her. Yet I want to know something about her, and to hear your opinion of her. Perhaps some day I may like to marry her. I might take her instead of this little girl," pointing to Atwa, "who will never do for me, and whom I will not have. She is worthless," he repeated, "worthless." Poor little Atwa stood listening, but I think with stolid indifference, for I watched her countenance, and could not detect even a passing shade of regret or disappointment. Indeed, of all the wives, Amusheh alone seemed to me to have any personal feeling of affection for the Emir. She, the moment he had left, fell upon me with questions. "Who is Turkya?" she asked, almost gasping for breath. It surprised me that she did not know, for she knew who El-Homeydi ibn Meshur was. I had to explain that his sister Ghiowseh had married Sotamm ibn Shaalan, and to tell her the story of Sotamm's second marriage; and of how Ghiowseh had determined to get rid of her rival, and succeeded in making the latter so uncomfortable, that she had left, and had since refused to return. Amusheh certainly cares about Ibn Rashid, and I thought she feared lest a new element of discord should be

brought into the family. As to her own position, it could hardly be affected by the arrival of a new wife; she, as Hamúd's sister, must be secure of her rank and influence, and the Emir, with his guilty conscience, would never dare, if he ever wished, to slight her or Hamúd, to whose support he owes so much.

From Amusheh's house I went with a black slave girl to another house also within the kasr, that of Hamúd's wife, Beneyeh, a daughter of Metaab. There I saw Urgheyeh, her sister, married to Majid, son of Hamúd; also another wife of Hamúd's. This last person I found was not considered as an equal, and on asking about her birth and parentage, was told, "She is the daughter of a Shammar." "Who?" I inquired. "Ahad" (one). "But *who* is he?" "Ahad,—fulan min Haïl min el belad" (some one, a person of the town). She was hardly considered as belonging to *the* family. The third and fourth wives, whom I afterwards saw, are, like the first, relations, one a daughter of Tellál, and the other of Suleyman, Hamúd's uncle on the mother's side (khal). These four are young; Majid's mother, whose name I never heard, died, I believe, several years ago. Hamúd, like the Emir, keeps up the number of his wives to the exact figure permitted by the law of the Koran, any one who dies or fails to please being replaced as we replace a servant.

Beneyeh met me at her door, and we went

through a little ante-room or vestibule into her kahwah. Here we remained only a few moments till, to my surprise, three arm-chairs were brought and placed in the ante-room. On these I and Beneyeh and the second class wife sat, drinking tea out of tea-cups, with saucers and tea-spoons. The cups were filled to the brim, and the tea in them then filled to overflowing with lumps of sugar. It was, however, good. A pile of sweet limes was then brought; slaves peeled the fruits, and divided them into quarters, which they handed round. After these refreshments Beneyeh wished to show me her room upstairs. It was reached, like Amusheh's private apartment, by a rugged staircase from the kahwah, and was built in the same style, with two columns supporting the rafters, only it had no outlook, being lighted only by two small openings high up in the wall. It was, however, more interesting than Amusheh's room, for its walls were decorated with arms. There were eighteen or twenty swords, and several guns and daggers, arranged with some care and taste as ornaments. The guns were all very old-fashioned things, with long barrels, but most of them beautifully inlaid with silver. Two of the daggers we had already seen in the evening, when the Emir sent for them to show us as specimens of the excellence of Haïl goldsmiths' work. The swords, or sword-hilts, were of various degrees of richness, the blades I did not see. Unfortunately at the moment I did not think of

Obeyd and his three wishes, and so forgot to ask Beneyeh whether Obeyd's sword was among these; it would not have done to inquire about the widow, but there would have been no impropriety in asking about the sword, and I afterwards the more regretted having omitted to do so, because this proved to be my only opportunity. It would have been curious to ascertain whether Obeyd wore a plain unjewelled weapon in keeping with Wahhabi austerity. He would surely have disapproved, could he have foreseen it, of the gold and jewels, not to mention silks and brocaded stuffs now worn by his descendants; for his own children have none of the severe asceticism attributed to him, although they inherit his love of prayer.

Hamúd came upstairs while I was there with Beneyeh, but he only stayed a few minutes. They seemed to be on very good terms, and after he left she talked a great deal about him, and seemed very proud of him. "This is Hamúd's, and this, and this," said she, "and here is his bed," pointing to a pile of mattresses with a fine coverlid. There were several European articles of furniture in the room, an iron bedstead with mattresses, several common looking-glasses, with badly gilt frames, and a clock with weights. Urgheyeh now joined us, and Beneyeh particularly showed me a handsome necklace her sister wore of gold and coral, elaborately worked. "This was my father's," she told me, adding that the ornament came from Persia.

Beneyeh is immensely proud of her son, Abdallah, a fine boy of four months old. She and her sister were so amiable and anxious to please, that I could willingly have spent the rest of the afternoon with them. But it was now time to pay my next visit. After many good-byes and good wishes from both sisters, my black guide seized hold of my hand, and we proceeded to the apartments of another wife of Hamúd, Zehowa, daughter of Tellál. She is sympathetic and intelligent, extremely small and slight, with the tiniest of hands. Like the other ladies, she wore rings on her fingers, with big, irregular turquoises. We sat by the fire and ate sweet limes and trengs and drank tea. Zehowa sent for her daughter, a baby only nine months old, to show me, and I told her I had a daughter of my own, and that girls were better than boys, which pleased her, and she answered, "Yes, the daughter is the mother's, but the son belongs to the father."

Presently one of the guards, a tall black fellow, all in scarlet, came with a message for me, a request from the Beg that I would join him in the Emir's kahwah, where he was waiting for me. Zehowa, like her cousins, begged hard that I would stay, or at least promise to visit her again as soon as possible, and I, bidding her farewell, followed the scarlet and black swordsman through courts, alleys, and passages to the kahwah, where I found Wilfrid. He was being entertained by an elderly man with coffee and conversation. This personage was Mubarck,

already mentioned as the chief of the slaves, and he had been giving Wilfrid a vast deal of interesting information about horses, especially the dispersion of Feysul ibn Saoud's stud, and the chief sources from which that celebrated collection was obtained. It had been originally got together, he said, entirely from the Bedouins, both of Nejd and of the north, by purchase and in war.

I never saw Zehowa, Beneyeh, or Amusheh again, for the next few days were fully occupied, and afterwards, owing to our finding ourselves involved in a network of mystery, and subject to an adverse influence, the pressure of which made itself felt without our being able at first to lay hold of anything tangible, or even to conjecture the cause, it became more than ever an object to us to remain quiet and unobserved. But I am anticipating circumstances to be detailed further on.

About three days later I paid a visit to the harim of Hamúd's uncle. This gentleman, Suleyman, we were already acquainted with, from seeing him at Court on several occasions. He had sent me an invitation to visit his family, and two black slaves came to escort me to their house, one of the dependencies of the palace. In a kahwah opening out of a small yard, I found the old man waiting to receive me. He dyes his beard red, and loves books, amidst a pile of which he was sitting. I was in hopes that his conversation would be instructive, and we had just begun to talk when,

alas, his wife came in with a rush, followed by a crowd of other women, upon which he hastily gathered up all his books and some manuscripts which were lying about, and putting some of them away in a cupboard, carried off the rest and made his escape.

Ghut, his wife, was the stupidest person I had seen at Haïl, but very talkative, and hospitable with dates, fresh butter floating in its own buttermilk, and sugar-plums. The many-coloured crowd of white, brown, and black attendants, slaves, and children, were not in much awe of her, and chattered away without a check to their hearts' content. All were, however, respectful and attentive to me. Ghut's daughter, another Zehowa, presently arrived with a slave carrying her son, Abderrahman, a child about a year old. This Zehowa was good-looking, but nearly as stupid and tiresome as her mother. She was very much taken up with showing me her box of trinkets, which she sent for on purpose to display before me its contents. These were of the usual sort, gold ornaments for head and arms and ankles, set with turquoises and strings of pearls. The furniture of the room, which she and her mother specially pointed out for my admiration, was also like what I had already seen—presses or boxes on legs, and ornamented with rude silver plaques.

The conversation was dull. Here is a sample: *I.* "What do you do all day long? *Zeh.* "We live in the kasr." *I.* "Don't you go out at all?" *Zeh*

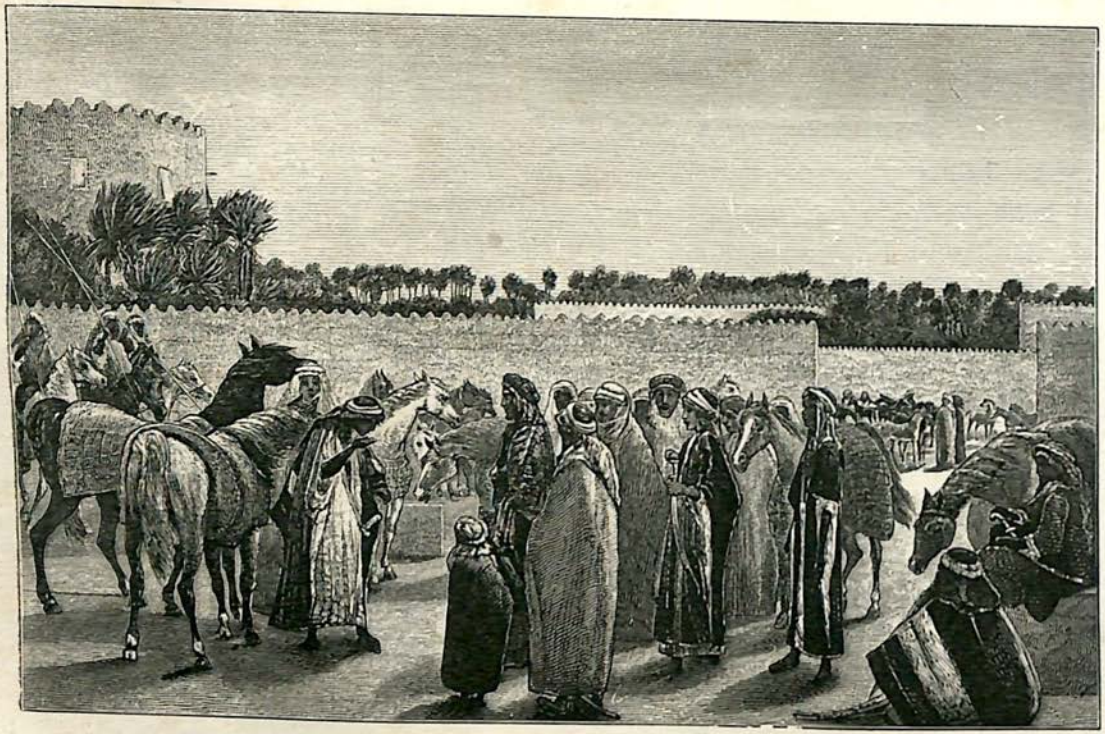
"No; we always stay in the kasr." *I.* "Then you never ride" (I always ask if they ride, to see the effect) "as we do?" *Zeh.* "No, we have no mares to ride." *I.* "What a pity! and don't you ever go into the country outside Haïl, the desert?" *Zeh.* "Oh, no, of course not." *I.* "But, to pass the time, what do you do?" *Zeh.* "We do nothing." Here a sharp black boy interrupted us, "O, khatûn, these are daughters of sheykhs, they have no work —no work *at all* to do, don't you understand?" *I.* "Of course, I understand perfectly; but they might amuse themselves without doing work," and turning to Zehowa I added, "Don't you even look at the horses?" *Zeh.* "No, we do nothing." *I.* "I should die if I did nothing. When I am at home I always walk round the first thing in the morning to look at my horses. How do you manage to spend your lives?" *Zeh.* "We sit." Thus supreme contentment in the harim here is to sit in absolute idleness. It seems odd, where the men are so active and adventurous, that the women should be satisfied to be bored; but such, I suppose, is the tyranny of fashion.

Every evening after dinner we used to receive a message from the Emir, inviting us to spend the evening with him. This was always the pleasantest part of the day, for we generally found one or two interesting visitors sitting with him. As a sample of these I give an extract from my journal:

"We found the Emir this evening in high good

humour. News had just come from El-Homeydi ibn Meshur, a Roala sheykh of the faction opposed to Sotamm, that a battle was fought about a month ago between the Roala and the Welled Ali, and that Sotamm has been worsted. Sotamm, at the head of a ghazú numbering six hundred horsemen, had marched against Ibn Smeyr at Jerud, but the latter refused to come out and fight him, and so Sotamm retired. On his way back home, however, he fell in with an outlying camp of Welled Ali, somewhere to the east of the Hauran, and summoned it to surrender. These, numbering only a hundred and fifty horsemen, at first entered into negotiation, and, it is said, offered to give up their camp and camels if they were permitted to retire with their mares (the women and children would of course not have been molested in any case), and to this Sotamm wished to agree. But the younger men of his party, and especially the Ibn Jendal family, who had a death to avenge, would not hear of compromise, and a battle ensued. It ended, strangely enough, in favour of the weaker side, who succeeded in killing four of the Roala, and among them Tellal ibn Shaalan, Sotamm's cousin and heir presumptive. Sotamm himself is said to have been saved only by the speed of his mare. Though the forces engaged were so disproportionate, nobody here seems surprised at the result, for victory and defeat are "min Allah," "in the hand of God;" but everybody is highly delighted, and the Emir can hardly contain

himself for joy. "What do you think now of Sotamm?" he said; "has he head, or has he no head?" "Not much, I am afraid," I answered, "but I am sorry for him. He is weak, and does not know how to manage his people, but he has a good heart." "And Ibn Smeyr, what do you say to Ibn Smeyr?" "He has more head than heart," I said. This delighted the Emir. "Ah," he replied, "it is you, khatûn, that have the head. Now what do you say to me? have I head, or not head?" "You have head," I answered. "And Hamúd?" "You all of you have plenty of head here, more of course than the Bedouins, who are most of them like children." "But we are Bedouins too," he said, hoping to be contradicted. "I like the Bedouins best," I replied; "it is better to have heart than head." Then he went on to cross-question me about all the other sheykhs whose names he knew. "Which," he asked, "is the best of all you have met with?" "Mohammed Dukhi," I said, "is the cleverest, Ferhan ibn Hedeb the best-mannered, but the one I like best is your relation in the Jezireh, Faris Jerba." I don't think he was quite pleased at this. He had never heard, he said, good or bad of Ibn Hedeb, who belonged to the Bisshr. He was not on terms with any of the Bisshr except Meshur ibn Mershid, who had paid him a visit two years ago. We told him that both Meshur and Faris were Wilfrid's "brothers." Meshur he liked, but Faris Jerba was evidently no favourite



IBN RASHID'S STABLE AT HAIL.

Vol. I., p 250.

of his. I fancy the Emir has taken Ferhan's part in the family quarrel. It is certain that when Amsheh, Sfuk's widow and Abdul Kerim's mother, came with her son Faris to Nejd, he would see neither of them. They stayed in the desert all the time they were here, and never came to Haïl. Rashid ibn Ali, too, is Faris's friend, and of course in no favour at this court.* He then asked about Jedaan, touched rather unfeelingly on the idiotcy of Turki, Jedaan's only son, and then cut some jokes at the expense of our old acquaintance, Smeyr ibn Zeydan. "An old fool," the Emir exclaimed, "why did they send him here? They might as well have sent a camel!" This is the Smeyr who came to Nejd a year and a half ago to try and get Ibn Rashid's assistance for Sotamm, and arrange a coalition against Jedaan and the Sebaa. We knew his mission had failed, but the fact is Ibn Rashid is eaten up with jealousy of anyone who has the least reputation in the desert. We are surprised, however, to find him so well informed about everything and everybody in the far north, and we are much interested, as he has solved for us one of the problems about Nejd which used to puzzle us, namely, the relations maintained by the tribes of Jebel Shammar with those of the north. The Emir has told us that the Shammar of the Jezireh and his own Shammar still count each other as near relations. "Our

* The Ibn Alis were formerly Sheykhs of the Shammar, but were displaced by the Ibn Rashids fifty years ago.

horses," he said, "are of the same blood." With the Roala he has made peace, and with Ibn Haddal; but the Sebaa and the rest of the Bisshr clan are out of his way. They never come anywhere near Nejd, except on ghazús, and that very rarely. Once, however, a ghazú, of Fedaan, had got as far as Kasím, and he had gone out against them, and captured a Seglawi Jedran mare of the Ibn Sbeni strain. He promised to show it to us. We then talked a good deal about horses, and our knowledge on this head caused general astonishment. Indeed, I think we could pass a better examination in the breeds than most of the Ibn Rashids. By long residence in town they have lost many of the Bedouin traditions. Hamúd, however, who takes more interest in horses than the Emir, has told us a number of interesting facts relating to the stud here, and that of the late Emir of Riad, Feysul ibn Saoud, solving another problem, that of the fabulous Nejd breed; but we are taking separate notes about these things.

We had not been talking long with the Emir and Hamúd, when a fat vulgar-looking fellow was introduced and made to sit down by us. It was evident that he was no Haïl man, for his features were coarse, and his manners rude. He talked with a strong Bagdadi accent, and was addressed by everyone as "ya Hajji." It was clear that he belonged to the Haj, but why was he here? The mystery was soon cleared up, for after a whispered

conversation with Hamúd, the new visitor turned to Wilfrid, and began addressing him in what we at first took to be gibberish, until seeing that we made no answer, he exclaimed in Arabic, "There, I told you he was no Englishman!" Wilfrid then cross-questioned him, and elicited the fact that he had been a stoker on board one of the British India Company's steamers on the Persian Gulf, and that the language he had been talking was English. Only two phrases, however, we succeeded in distinguishing, "werry good," and "chief engineer"—and having recognised them and given their Arabic equivalents, our identity was admitted. The fellow was then sent about his business, and a very small, very polite old man took his place. He was conspicuous among these well-dressed Shammar by the plainest possible dress, a dark brown abba without hem or ornament, and a cotton kefiyeh on his head, unbound by any aghal whatsoever. He was treated with great respect, however, by all, and it was easy to see that he was a man of condition. He entered freely into conversation with us, and talked to Mohammed about his relations in Aared, and it presently appeared that he was from Southern Nejd. This fact explained the severity of his costume, for among the Wahhabis, no silk or gold ornaments are tolerated. He was, in fact, the Sheykh of Harík, the last town of Nejd towards the south, and close to the Dahna, or great southern desert. This he described to us as exactly like the

Nefûd we have just crossed, only with more vegetation. The ghada is the principal wood, but there are palms in places.

It is not the custom of Haïl to smoke, either from Wahhabi prejudice, or, as I am more inclined to think, because tobacco has never penetrated so far inland in quantities sufficient to make the habit general. No objection, however, has been made to Wilfrid's pipe, which he smokes when and where he chooses, and this evening when the call to prayer sounded, and the Emir and Hamúd had gone out to perform their devotions, the old man I have just mentioned, Nassr ibn Hezani, hinted without more ceremony that he should like a whiff. He has quarrelled with Ibn Saoud, and probably hates all the Wahhabi practices, and was very glad to take the opportunity of committing this act of wickedness. He was careful, however, to return the pipe before the rest came back. He, at any rate, if a Wahhabi, is not one of the disagreeable sort described by Mr. Palgrave, for he invited us very cordially to go back home with him to Harík. The Emir, however, made rather a face at this suggestion, and gave such an alarming account of what would happen to us if we went to Riad, that I don't think it would be wise to attempt to go there now. We could not go in fact without the Emir's permission. I do not much care, for town life is wearisome; we have had enough of it, and I have not much curiosity to see more of Nejd, unless we can go

among the Bedouins there. If Ibn Saoud still had his collection of mares the sight of them would be worth some risk, but his stud has long since been scattered, and Nassr ibn Hezani assures us that there is nothing now in Arabia to compare with Ibn Rashid's stud. Ibn Hezani, like everybody else, laughs at the story of a Nejd breed, and says, as everybody else does, that the mares at Riad were a collection made by Feysul ibn Saoud in quite recent times.

Later in the evening, a native goldsmith was introduced, with a number of articles worked by him at Haïl. They were pretty, but not specially interesting, or very unlike what may be seen elsewhere, dagger hilts and sheaths, and a few ornaments. It was this man, however, who had made the gold hilts which all the princely family here wear to their swords. These we examined, and found the work really good.

The most amusing incident of the evening, however, and one which we were not at all prepared for, was the sudden production by the Emir of one of those toys called telephones, which were the fashion last year in Europe. This the Emir caused two of his slaves to perform with, one going into the courtyard outside, and the other listening. The message was successfully delivered, the slave outside, to make things doubly sure, shouting at the top of his voice, "Ya Abdallah weyn ente? yeridak el Emir." "O Abdallah, where are you? the Emir wants you," and other such phrases. We

expressed great surprise, as in duty bound; indeed, it was the first time we had actually seen the toy, and it is singular to find so very modern an invention already at Haïl.

At about ten o'clock, the Emir began to yawn, and we all got up and wished him good-night. He very kindly sent for, and gave me, a number of trengs and oränges, which he gave orders should be conveyed to our house, together with a new-laid ostrich's egg, the "first of the season," which had just been brought to him from the Nefûd.

EVENING WITH THE EMIR.

CHAPTER XI.

"I shall do well:
The people love me, and the Desert 's mine;
My power 's a crescent, and my auguring hope
Says it will come to the full."

SHAKESPEARE.

Political and historical—Shepherd rule in Arabia—An hereditary policy—The army—The law—Taxation—The finances of Jebel Shammar—Ibn Rashid's ambition.

THE following is the result of our inquiries made while at Haïl into the political condition and resources of the country. It has no pretension to rigid accuracy, especially in the figures given, but it will serve to convey an idea of the kind of government found in Arabia, and of the capacity for self-rule of the Arab race.

The political constitution of Jebel Shammar is exceedingly curious; not only is it unlike anything we are accustomed to in Europe, but it is probably unique, even in Asia. It would seem, in fact, to represent some ancient form of government indigenous to the country, and to have sprung naturally from the physical necessities of the land, and the character of its inhabitants. I look upon Ibn Rashid's government as in all likelihood identical with that of the Kings of Arabia, who came to visit Solomon, and of the Shepherd Kings,

who, at a still earlier date, held Egypt and Babylonia; and I have little doubt that it owes its success to the fact of its being thus in harmony with Arab ideas and Arab tradition. To understand it rightly, one ought to consider what Arabia is, and what the Arab character and mode of life. The whole of the peninsula, with the exception, perhaps, of Yémen, and certain districts of Hadramant within the influence of the monsoon winds, is a rainless, waterless region, in every sense of the word a desert. The soil is a poor one, mainly of gravel or of sand, and except in a few favoured spots, unsuited for cultivation; indeed, no cultivation is possible at all in Nejd, except with the help of irrigation, and, as there is no water above ground, of irrigation from wells. Even wells are rare. The general character of the central plateaux, and of the peninsula, is that of vast uplands of gravel, as nearly destitute of vegetation as any in the world, and incapable of retaining water, even at a great depth. It is only in certain depressions of the plain, several hundred feet lower than the general level, that wells as a rule are found, and wherever these occur with a sufficient supply of water, towns and villages with gardens round them, have sprung up. These, however, are often widely apart, showing as mere spots on the map of Arabia, and unconnected with each other by any intervening district of agricultural land. Indeed, it is not too much to say, that Nejd contains no agricultural region, as

we understand agriculture, and that all its production is garden produce. From this state of things, it happens that there is also no rural class, and that each town is isolated from its neighbours to a degree impossible with us. The desert surrounds them like a sea, and they have no point of contact one with the other in the shape of intervening fields or villages, or even intervening pastures. They are isolated in the most literal sense, and from this fact has sprung the political individuality it has always been their care to maintain. Each city is an independent state.

Meanwhile the desert outside, though untenanted by any settled population, is roamed over by the Bedouin tribes, who form the bulk of the Arab race. These occupy for the most part the Nefûds, where alone pasture in any abundance is found; but they frequent also every part of the upland districts, and being both more warlike and more numerous than the townsmen, hold every road leading from town to town, so that it depends upon their good will and pleasure, to cut off communication for the citizens entirely from the world.

The towns, as I have said, are for the most part self-supporting; but their production is limited to garden produce, and the date. They grow no wheat and rear no stock, so that for bread and meat they are dependent on without. They require also a market for their industries, the weaving of cloth, the manufacture of arms and

utensils, and it is necessary, at least in Jebel Shammar, to send yearly caravans to the Euphrates for corn. Thus security of travelling outside their walls is essential to the life of every town in Arabia, and on this necessity the whole political structure of their government is built. The towns put themselves each under the protection of the principal Bedouin Sheykh of its district, who, on the consideration of a yearly tribute, guarantees the citizens' safety outside the city walls, enabling them to travel unmolested as far as his jurisdiction extends, and this, in the case of a powerful tribe, may be many hundred miles, and embrace many cities. The towns are then said to "belong" to such and such a tribe, and the Bedouin Sheykh becomes their suzerain, or Lord Protector, until, from their common vassalage, and the freedom of intercourse it secures them with each other, the germs of federation spring up, and develop sometimes into nationality.

This has, I believe, been always the condition of Arabia.

A farther development then ensues. The Bedouin Sheykh, grown rich with the tribute of a score of towns, builds himself a castle close to one of them, and lives there during the summer months. Then with the prestige of his rank (for Bedouin blood is still accounted the purest), and backed by his power in the desert, he speedily becomes the practical ruler of the town, and from protector of the citizens

becomes their sovereign. He is now dignified by them with the title of Emir or prince, and though still their Sheykh to the Bedouins, becomes king of all the towns which pay him tribute.

This form of government, resting as it does on a natural basis, has always been reverted to in Arabia, whenever the country has, after an interval of foreign or domestic tyranny, succeeded in emancipating itself. Of very early Arabia little is known; neither the Persian nor the Macedonian nor the Roman Empires embraced it, and it is probable that Nejd at least existed till the time of Mahomet exclusively under the system of government I have described. Then for a short time it became part of the Mussulman Empire, and shared in the centralised or semi-centralised administration of the Caliphs, which substituted a theocratic rule for the simpler forms preceding it. But though the birthplace of Islam, no part of the Arabian Empire was sooner in revolt than Arabia itself. In the second century of the Mahometan era, nearly all the peninsula had reverted to its ancient independence, nor, except temporarily, has Nejd itself ever been since included in the imperial system of a foreign king or potentate. In the middle of last century, however, just as Mahomet had asserted his spiritual authority over the peninsula, the Wahhabi Emir of Aared once more established a centralized and theocratic government in Arabia. The Bedouin Princes were one after another dispossessed, and

a new Arabian Empire was established. This included not only the whole of Nejd, but at one time Yemen, Hejaz, and Hasa, with the northern desert as far north as the latitude of Damascus. For nearly sixty years the independence of the towns and tribes of the interior was crushed, and a system of imperial rule substituted for that of old Arabia. The Ibn Saouds, "Imâms of Nejd," governed neither more nor less than had the first Caliphs, and with the same divine pretensions. But their rule came to an end in 1818, when Nejd was conquered by the Turks, and the reigning Ibn Saoud made prisoner and beheaded at Constantinople. Then, on the retirement of the Turks, (for they were unable long to retain their conquest,) shepherd government again asserted itself, and the principality of Jebel Shammar was founded.

The Shammar tribe is the most powerful of Northern Nejd, and the towns of Haïl, Kefar, Bekaa, and the rest, put themselves under the protection of Abdallah ibn Rashid, who had succeeded in gaining the Shammar Sheykhat for himself. He seems to have been a man of great ability, and to him is due the policy of rule which his descendants have ever since pursued. He took up his residence in Haïl, and built the castle there, and caused himself to be recognized as Emir, first in vassalage to the Ibn Saouds, who had reappeared in Aared, but later on his own account. His policy seems to have been first to conciliate or subdue the

other Bedouin tribes of Nejd, forcing them to become tributary to his own tribe, the Shammar, and secondly to establish his protectorate over all the northern towns. This was a simple plan enough, and one which any Bedouin Sheykh might have devised; but Abdallah's merit consists in the method of its application. He saw that in order to gain his object, he must appeal to national ideas and national prejudices. The tribute which he extracted from the towns, he spent liberally in the desert, exercising boundless hospitality to every sheykh who might chance to visit him. To all he gave presents, and dazzled them with his magnificence, sending them back to the tribes impressed with his wealth and power. Thus he made numerous friends, with whose aid he was able to coerce the rest, his enemies or rivals. In treating with these he seems always to have tried conciliation first, and, if forced to arms, to have been satisfied with a single victory, making friends at once with the vanquished, and even restoring to them their property, an act of generosity which met full appreciation in the desert. By this means his power and reputation increased rapidly, as did that of his brother and right-hand man Obeyd, who is now a legendary hero in Nejd.

Another matter to which the founder of the Ibn Rashid dynasty paid much attention was finance. Though spending large sums yearly on presents and entertainments, he took care that these should not

exceed his revenue, and at his death he left, according to common report, a house full of silver pieces to his son. Nor have any of his successors been otherwise than thrifty. It is impossible of course to guess the precise amount of treasure thus saved, but that it represents a fabulous fortune in Arabia is certain; the possession of this, with the prestige which in a poor country wealth gives, is an immense source of power.

Lastly Abdallah, and all the Ibn Rashid family, have been endowed with a large share of caution. No important enterprise has been embarked on in a hurry; and certainly at the present day affairs of state are discussed in family council, before any action is taken. It seems to have been always a rule with the Ibn Rashids to think twice, thrice, or a dozen times before acting, for even Mohammed's violent deeds towards his nephews were premeditated, and thought over for many months beforehand. In their conduct with the Ibn Saouds and the Turkish Sultans, they have always waited their opportunity, and avoided an open rupture. It is very remarkable that so many members of this family should be superior men, for it is difficult to say who has been the ablest man of them, Abdallah, Obeyd, Tellál, Mohammed, or his cousin Hamúd. Nor is the rising generation less promising.

Having united into a sort of confederation all the Bedouin tribes of Northern Nejd, Abdallah became naturally supreme over the towns; but he was not

satisfied merely with power, he aimed at making his rule popular. It is much to his credit, and to that of his successors, that none of them seem to have abused their position. Liberality and conciliation, combined with an occasional display of power, have been no less their policy with the townsmen than with the Bedouins, and they have thus placed their rule on its only secure basis, popularity. In early days the Ibn Rashids had to fight for their position at Haïl, and later in Jôf and at Meskakeh. But their rule is now acknowledged freely everywhere, enthusiastically in Jebel Shammar. It strikes a traveller fresh from Turkey as surpassingly strange to hear the comments passed by the townspeople of Haïl on their government, for it is impossible to converse ten minutes with any one of them without being assured that the government of the Emir is the best government in the world. "El hamdu lillah, ours is a fortunate country. It is not with us as with the Turks and Persians, whose government is no government. Here we are happy and prosperous. El hamdu lillah." I have often been amused at this chauvinism.

In the town of Haïl the Emir lives in state, having a body-guard of 800 or 1000 men dressed in a kind of uniform, that is to say, in brown cloaks and red or blue kefiyehs, and armed with silver-hilted swords. These are recruited from among the young men of the towns and villages by voluntary enlistment, those who wish to serve inscribing their

names at the castle, and being called out as occasion requires. Their duties are light, and they live most of them with their families, receiving neither pay nor rations, except when employed away from home on garrison duty in outlying forts and at Jôf. Their expense, therefore, to the Emir is little more than that of their clothes and arms. To them is entrusted any police work that may be necessary in the towns, but it is very seldom that the authority of the Emir requires other support than that of public opinion. The Arabs of Nejd are a singularly temperate race, and hardly ever indulge in brawling or breaches of the peace. If disputes arise between citizens they are almost always settled on the spot by the interference of neighbours; and the rowdyism and violence of European towns are unknown at Haïl. Where, however, quarrels are not to be settled by the intervention of friends, the disputants bring their cases to the Emir, who settles them in open court, the *mejlis*, and whose word is final. The law of the Koran, though often referred to, is not, I fancy, the main rule of the Emir's decision, but rather Arabian custom, an authority far older than the Mussulman code. I doubt if it is often necessary for the soldiers to support such decisions by force. Thieving, I have been repeatedly assured, is almost unknown at Haïl; but robbers or thieves taken redhanded, lose for the first offence a hand, for the second their head.

In the desert, and everywhere outside the precincts

of the town, order is kept by the Bedouins, with whom the Emir lives a portion of each year. He is then neither more nor less himself than a Bedouin, throws off his shoes and town finery, arms himself with a lance, and leads a wandering life in the Nefûd. He commonly does this at the commencement of spring, and spring is the season of his wars. Then with the extreme heat of summer he returns to Haïl. The tribute paid by each town and village to the Emir is assessed according to its wealth in date palms, and the sheep kept by its citizens with the Bedouins. Four khrush for each tree is, I believe, the amount, trees under seven years old being exempt. At Haïl this is levied by the Emir's officers, but elsewhere by the local sheykhs, who are responsible for its due collection. At Jôf and Meskakeh, which are still in the position of territory newly annexed, Ibn Rashid is represented by a vakil, or lieutenant, who levies the tax in coin, Turkish money being the recognised medium of exchange everywhere. Without pretending to anything at all like accuracy we made a calculation that the Emir's revenue from all sources of tribute and tax may amount to £60,000 yearly, and that the annual passage of the pilgrimage through his dominions may bring £20,000 to £30,000 more to his exchequer.

With regard to his expenditure, it is perhaps easier to calculate. He pays a small sum yearly in tribute to the Sherif of Medina, partly as a religious offering, partly to insure immunity for his outlying

possessions, Kheybar, Kâf and the rest, from Turkish aggression. I should guess this tribute to be £3,000 to £5,000, but could not ascertain the amount. The Emir's expenditure on his army can hardly be more, and with his civil list and every expense of Government, should be included within £10,000. On his household he may spend £5,000, and on his stable £1,000. By far the largest item in his budget must be described as entertainment. Mohammed ibn Rashid, in imitation of his predecessors, feeds daily two to three hundred guests at the palace; the poor are there clothed, and presents of camels and clothes made to richer strangers from a distance. The meal consists of rice and camel meat, sometimes mutton, and there is besides a constant "coulage" in dates and coffee, which I cannot estimate at less than £50 a day, say £20,000 yearly, or with presents, £25,000. Thus we have our budget made up to about £45,000 expenditure, as against £80,000 to £90,000 revenue—which leaves a handsome margin for wars and other accidents, and for that amassing of treasure which is traditional with the Ibn Rashids. I must say, however, once more, that I am merely guessing my figures, and nobody, perhaps, in Jebel Shammar, except the Emir himself and Hamúd, could do more.

It will be seen from all this that Jebel Shammar is, financially, in a very flourishing state. The curse of money-lending has not yet invaded it, and neither

prince nor people are able to spend sixpence more than they have got. No public works, requiring public expenditure and public loans, have yet been undertaken, and it is difficult to imagine in what they would consist. The digging of new wells is indeed the only duty a "company" could find to execute, for roads are unnecessary in a country all like a macadamised highway; there are no rivers to make canals with, or suburban populations to supply with tramways. One might predict with confidence, that the secret of steam locomotion will have been forgotten before ever a railway reaches Jebel Shammar.

With regard to the form of government, it is good mainly because it is effective. It is no doubt discordant to European ideas of political propriety, that the supreme power in a country should be vested in Bedouin hands. But in Arabia they are the only hands that can wield it. The town cannot coerce the desert; therefore, if they are to live at peace, the desert must coerce the town. The Turks, with all their machinery of administration, and their power of wealth and military force, have never been able to secure life and property to travellers in the desert, and in Arabia have been powerless to hold more than the towns. Even the pilgrim road from Damascus, though nominally in their keeping, can only be traversed by them with an army, and at considerable risk. Ibn Rashid, on the other hand, by the mere effect of his will, keeps

all the desert in an absolute peace. In the whole district of Jebel Shammar, embracing, as it does, some of the wildest deserts, inhabited by some of the wildest people in the world, a traveller may go unarmed and unescorted, without more let or hindrance than if he were following a highway in England. On every road of Jebel Shammar, townsmen may be found jogging on donkey-back, alone, or on foot, carrying neither gun nor lance, and with all their wealth about them. If you ask about the dangers of the road, they will return the question, "Are we not here in Ibn Rashid's country?" No system, however perfect, of patrols and forts and escorts, could produce a result like this.

In the town, on the other hand, the Bedouin prince, despotic though he may be, is still under close restraint from public opinion. The citizens of Jebel Shammar have not what we should call constitutional rights; there is no machinery among them for the assertion of their power; but there is probably no community in the old world, where popular feeling exercises a more powerful influence on government than it does at Haïl. The Emir, irresponsible as he is in individual acts, knows well that he cannot transgress the traditional unwritten law of Arabia with impunity. An unpopular sheykh would cease, *ipso facto*, to be sheykh, for, though dethroned by no public ceremony, and subjected to no personal ill-treatment, he would find himself abandoned in favour of a more acceptable member of his family.

The citizen soldiers would not support a recognised tyrant in the town, nor would the Bedouins outside. Princes in Arabia have, therefore, to consider public opinion before all else.

The flaw in the system, for in every system there will be found one, lies in the uncertainty of succession to the Sheykhat or Bedouin throne. On the death of an Emir, if he have no son of full age and acknowledged capacity to take up the reins of government, rival claimants, brothers, uncles, or cousins of the dead man, dispute his succession in arms, and many and bitter have been the wars in consequence. Such, quite lately, was the quarrel which convulsed Aared on the death of Feysul ibn Saoud, and led to the disintegration of the Wahhabi monarchy, and such, one cannot help fearing, may be the fate of Jebel Shammar, on Mohammed's. He has no children, and the sons of Tellál, the next heirs to the throne, have a formidable rival in Hamúd. The Emir, however, is a young man, forty-five, and may live long; and if he should do so, seems to have the succession of the Wahhabi monarchy in his hands. He has effected, he and his predecessors, the union of all the Bedouin sheykhs, from Meshhed Ali to Medina, under his leadership, and is in close connection with those of Kasim and Aared. His authority is established as far north as Kâf, and he has his eye already on the towns still further north, if ever they should shake off the Turkish bondage. I look forward to the day when the Roala too,

and the Welled Ali, shall have entered into his alliance, possibly even the Sebaa and Ibn Haddal; and though it is neither likely nor desirable that the old Wahhabi Empire should be re-established on its centralised basis, a confederation of the tribes of the north may continue its best traditions. Hauran and the Leja, and the Euphrates towns, were once tributary to the Ibn Saouds, and may be again one day to the Ibn Rashids. This is looking far afield, but not farther than Mohammed himself looks.

NOTE.—That Mohammed ibn Rashid does not limit his ambition to Nejd has been very recently proved. In the month of April last, 1880, he marched with an army of 5000 men from Haïl, passed up the Wady Sirhán, surprised Mohammed Dukhi ibn Smeyr in the Harra and sacked his camp, and then went on to the Hauran. The citizens of Damascus were not a little startled at learning one morning that the Emir was at Bozra not 60 miles from the capital of Syria, and there was much speculation as to his object in coming so far northwards, no army from Nejd having been seen in the Pashalik since the days of the Wahhabi Empire. Then it was whispered that he had made friends with Ibn Smeyr, that the quarrel between them had been a mistake, and that a Sherari guide, held responsible for the blunder, had been beheaded; lastly, that an enormous feast of reconciliation had been given by Ibn Rashid to the Northern tribes, at which 75 camels and 600 sheep had been slaughtered, and that after a stay of some weeks at Melakh the Emir had returned to Nejd.

Without pretending to know precisely what was in Mohammed's mind in making this ghazú, or all that really happened, it seems to me not difficult to guess its main object. Ibn Smeyr's success over Ibn Shaalan, already alluded to, had placed him in a leading position with the tribes of the North; and his raid against the Druses of the Hauran, a district once tributary to the Emirs of Nejd, pointed him out for Mohammed's resentment. It is part of the Ibn Rashid policy to strike a blow and then make peace; and by thus humbling their most successful chief, and becoming afterwards his host, Mohammed achieved exactly that sort of reputation

he most valued with the Northern tribes. He has asserted himself as supreme, where he chooses to be so, in the desert, and has moreover reminded the frontier population in Syria of the old Wahhabi pretensions to Eastern Syria. It is conceivable that having coerced or persuaded the Anazeh to join his league, he may, in the coming break-up of the Ottoman Empire, succeed to that part of its inheritance, and be recognised as sovereign in all the lands beyond Jordan.

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